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Teachers' Perceptions of Response-to-Intervention Reading Strategies in Middle Schools

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MA, Adelphi University, 2005

BA, York College, 2002

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

As students enter middle school, many lack literacy skills, especially English language learners (ELLs). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine what supports middle school teachers perceived they needed to be effective using response to intervention (RTI) strategies with ELLs. This basic qualitative study was framed by the RTI framework as described in the Individual with Disabilities Education Act and by Hall and Hord's concerns-based adoption model. Interviews were conducted with eight teachers with a minimum of 3 years of service who used RTI practices in their classrooms in middle schools in school districts from the Northeast to the Midwest of the United States. Data were open coded to determine emergent themes. Findings showed that middle school teachers needed and used effective teaching intervention strategies to support RTI reading instruction and needed support from leaders and peers to increase ELLs' academic growth in RTI reading, especially the use of comprehensive intervention in the period of COVID-19. The teachers also desired more professional development to address RTI, and shared that administrators needed to be aware of their concerns. Positive social change could occur as administrators and teacher leaders in middle schools apply the findings of this study to provide better teacher support for RTI reading strategies in their middle school classrooms with ELLs.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my three children, Dain, Kasheena, and Rasheen Collins, who have helped me along the way to pursue my dreams. They were instrumental in giving support in the days I felt like giving up on my studies, and I am very grateful for their words of encouragement. Raising three children without a second parent was very difficult, but over the years I have leaned on my faith to help overcome stressful situations. My children, who observed my determination to not give up on any assignment due to stress and cheered me on, were very helpful. Their inspiring words were instrumental in helping me remain focused on the end goal: to acquire my doctorate so that I can make a difference in life and be an encouragement to other single mothers.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

U.S. educators have aimed to create a learning experience that is conducive to the success of every learner (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). To further this goal, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) was enacted by Congress to ensure that students made progress irrespective of race, income, zip code, disability, home language, or background. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, n.d.-a), the percentage of students who were English language learners (ELLs) was 9.6% in the fall of 2016 compared to 8.1% in the fall of 2000. To address students' educational needs, public schools were tasked to provide quality classes (Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015). In 2004, the U.S. government reauthorized the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and subsequently promoted response to intervention (RTI) as an approached to make IDEA more fruitful (Alahmari, 2019). Ariati et al. (2018) indicated that there was a need for students to have a strong foundation in English literacy to be successful, and teachers could use techniques to enhance students' learning.

In December of 2015, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was updated and reauthorized by Congress as the ESSA. The Act built on areas of progress achieved by educators, communities, parents, and students across the country (U.S. Department of Education, IDEA, n.d.). To help support students with learning disabilities (LDs), RTI was proposed as an option in contrast to a focus on a significant discrepancy between students' ability (regularly estimated by IQ testing) and students' academic accomplishment (as estimated by evaluations and state administered testing); RTI instead provided early intervention for all children in danger of low academic achievement (Maki et al., 2020).

RTI services supported by IDEA were provided by a mixture of personnel, such as general education teachers, special educators, and specialists (Alahmari, 2019). From 2004 to the present, districts had been required to implement RTI for grades K–12 (Zirkel, 2017). RTI replaced the IQ achievement tests schools once used to identify struggling students or those with (Maki et al., 2020). Subsequently, both the U.S. Department of Education and the Department of Justice published directions in January of 2015 prompting states, school districts, and schools to follow regulations that allowed ELLs equal access to quality education and the chance to accomplish their full academic potential (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, n.d.). For example, in the Midwest United States, the influx of ELLs had created the need in many public school districts for more support to meet the needs of these students regarding language, culture, and education (Garrett et al., 2019). In U.S. public schools, the percentage of ELLs had been higher in urbanized areas than those in less populated regions. ELLs have averaged 14% of public-school enrollment in cities (an area that has municipalities with local government), 9.3% in suburban neighborhoods, 6.5% in towns (an area that is populated with a fixed boundary and local government), and 3.8% in rural areas (NCES, n.d.-b).

To help ELLs and struggling students achieve academic success, the RTI framework implemented in the nation's schools has been used to organize curriculum, instructions, and assessments. RTI was created to benefit ELLs and other students who have been overrepresented in special education (Carter-Smith, 2018; Ciullo et al., 2016). The RTI framework is a multitiered service-delivery system that educators can use to screen, assess, and educate most students with LDs (Barrio & Combes, 2015).

All students enrolled in public schools are screened, and those in jeopardy of not meeting academic standards can participate in appropriate RTI interventions (Swindlehurst et al., 2015). The RTI framework comprises essential components: all-inclusive screening, progress checking, and multilayered instructional assistance conveyance (Vaughn & Swanson, 2015). RTI has been used to enhance teaching and eliminate barriers to students achieving academic success (Mundschenk & Fuchs, 2016). Many states have used RTI to meet the reading instruction requirements of IDEA (Berkeley et al., 2020). In elementary schools, RTI has been well established but has recently been adopted by middle school teachers to help struggling students (Hollingsworth, 2019). To implement RTI, educators have used evidence-based interventions and students' data in three instructional layouts: Tiers 1, 2, and 3 (Turse & Albrecht, 2015). The classroom teacher assists students in Tier 1 with evidence-based instructions, whereas students in Tier 2 go through continuous progress monitoring. Tier 3 is for those students who do not respond to instructions and will be given further intervention or special education (Arden et al., 2017; Berkeley et al., 2020).

Educators have applied the RTI multitiered approach in middle schools to increase academic achievement, perceiving RTI as a research-based core curriculum with levels at which students can excel (Ciullo et al., 2016). Teachers in middle schools attempt to address literacy at the grade level (Epler, 2016). Because ELLs are entering general education classes, teachers with these students in their classrooms use the tiers to help them achieve academic success (C. N. Thomas et al., 2020). These educators also have sought to understand support for RTI reading strategies needed to help ELLs in middle schools (De Jong et al., 2018; Villegas et al., 2018).

In middle schools, RTI can be challenging, and addressing ELLs who need RTI reading instruction has left teachers unprepared (Hougen, 2015). Middle school teachers have considered whether RTI strategies have not been effective and concluded that there needs to be progress after focusing on improvement in education reforms (Barrio, 2017). It is possible, however, that supports for RTI reading strategies have not been adequate or effective because there is little known about them at the middle school level with ELLs (Barrio, 2017; Fisher & Frey, 2018; Zumeta, 2015).

Implementing RTI can be challenging, particularly when working with ELLs (Berkeley et al., 2020; Bippert, 2019; Pierce & Jackson, 2017). In middle schools, professional development (PD) and collaboration with principals are fundamental to growth (McMaster et al., 2020). Benedict et al. (2020) found that although there was evidence the tiered instruction within the RTI framework was essential for students with reading difficulties, there was not a study that demonstrated the method from which teachers could acquire the advanced knowledge that was critical to implementing organized evidence-based instruction throughout the instructional tiers.

In this chapter, I describe the background of the problem, the purpose of this study, and the research question (RQ) that guided it. I discuss the conceptual framework and the nature of the study, provide definitions of terms, and list assumptions. I also address the scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study.

Background

In the 21st century, advanced literacy is a prerequisite to adult success. Teachers who are supportive can assist students to use reading to gain access to information, incorporate learning from distinctive sources, scrutinize arguments, and gain knowledge

of new subjects (Xenia et al., 2019). However, there is a growing concern to increase teachers who can assist with the influx of ELLs (Xenia et al., 2019). As of 2015, approximately 5,000,000 ELLs constitute 10% of Grades K–12 according to the most recent data available (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, n.d.). Educational institutions must be ready for the future and teachers must be ready for the changes taking place in the 21st-century classroom and understand how to address challenges with struggling students (Göçen et al., 2020). To address students with English as a second language, it is important that teachers have effective strategies and clear guidance regarding what is needed to engage ELL students in their academic growth (K. Smith, 2019). Middle school teachers with ELLs in their classrooms have a duty to help students achieve academic success using strategic approaches (K. Smith, 2019).

Teachers who engage with ELLs should understand that effective implementation of RTI reading is a vital skill and that knowledge-based competencies are necessary for instructional approaches (Schoffner & De Oliveria, 2017). Acosta and Sanczyk (2019) found that teachers attempted to comprehend the social backgrounds, languages, cultures, and values in their diverse ethnic communities' children and families. Williams and Martinez (2019) indicated that teachers reported numerous methods such as (a) using reading to gain access to knowledge around the students, (b) learning to synthesize information from different sources, and (c) evaluating arguments; however, Williams and Martinez further indicated that middle school teachers of ELLs must be given the necessary support.

Approximately 45 state education agencies have recommended RTI in schools and districts (Hudson & McKenzie, 2016). In 2004, the U.S. government reauthorized IDEA, which was designed to address learning failures and guaranteed student access to public education (Carter-Smith, 2018). IDEA was created to benefit all students in jeopardy of failure by advocating for equal access to education, including for students with a disability. Currently, IDEA of 2004 (revised in 2017) and ESSA (2015) emphasize that student learning must be provided without discrimination. The ESSA, which replaced the NCLB (2001), kept student testing requirements, giving more power to states to test students. ESSA (2015) encouraged schools to undertake vigorous activities to enable students to succeed. Zirkel (2013) reported that RTI interventions were created to boost academic growth among low-income students. RTI was considered and implemented in schools that were disproportionate in funding, such as low-income areas, to increase student learning. IDEA allowed state policymakers to choose RTI as a powerful intervention.

E. R. Thomas et al. (2020) indicated that RTI was an essential framework for teachers to use for improving elementary and secondary grade students; however, it is more challenging to successfully implement RTI in secondary schools. E. R. Thomas et al.'s findings indicated that needs for secondary education students were different from the needs of elementary students, which may be due to different implementing factors. Pierce and Jackson (2017) indicated that RTI implementation was an ongoing challenge and provided 10 steps educators can follow to implement RTI in schools, including focusing on leadership, building capacity, allocating resources, getting all stakeholders on board, and creating an RTI team while considering at-risk students. Zirkel (2014) noted

that education researchers have implemented RTI researched-based practices to improve students' academic outcomes. Park (2019) found that, though educators made substantial efforts to identify ELLs for special education, RTI guidelines helped increase interest in ruling out a lack of opportunity for learning English because RTI consists of a high-quality Tier 1 English language development strategy.

RTI has brought changes in the school system throughout the United States. Berkeley et al. (2020) found that RTI has changed since its first decade of implementation. Berkeley et al. indicated that numerous states had ensured that RTI policies were regulated and practiced at state and local education agency levels. Because it was necessary to comprehend the critical role of RTI implementation, all 50 states' education agencies conducted a system-wide review that provided a snapshot of states' interpretation of RTI a decade after the finalization of IDEA regulations. In addition, Berkeley et al. noted there was considerable advancement toward creating ways to deal with supports to students addressed in the multitiered systems of support (MTSS) model. Likewise, there were variations in how states implemented and communicated the multitiered systems in schools to meet the special education curriculum prerequisites and the various roles the framework addressed.

In middle schools, it is difficult to allocate blocks of time for small groups in Tier 2 and Tier 3 and manage the classroom. Challenges can occur in many other areas, such as students' educational needs where there are changing demographics, economics, workforce needs, and school responsibilities. Therefore, school leaders have had to continue inspecting and modifying core curriculum and methods of instruction to enhance student learning. Throughout the years, classroom management has been

discussed with the hope that it will be addressed to help create a safe school environment (Skiba & Losen, 2016). Sinclair et al. (2020) indicated that teachers perceived a need for students' behavioral plans, especially for youths at risk; therefore, the behavioral plan was used as a moderated plan for the middle school and as a collective plan for the classroom management preparation program. McIntosh et al. (2018) implied that students of diverse backgrounds tended to be more stigmatized; therefore, educators have sought effective ways to reduce disproportionality in schools.

Some researchers have focused on ELLs in middle schools and RTI support that has been implemented for all learners in all levels of schooling with struggling readers. However, limited research has addressed the support middle school teachers may need when using RTI reading strategies with ELLs. Without more understanding of what may be effective on the part of teachers, middle school ELLs may not reach learning goals.

Problem Statement

There is a need for rigorous reading intervention in middle school, notably for ELLs, along with adequate support to help teachers assist these students with overcoming their reading difficulties (C. N. Thomas et al., 2020). The demographic shift in the U.S. nation's public schools, such as an influx of students with first a language other than English, has created the need to address ELLs' academic growth in reading and help these students reach the same academic level of their English-speaking peers (Schneider, 2019). In the United States, many middle schools have incorporated RTI to help struggling readers (Epler, 2016; Zirkel, 2017). However, implementing RTI in middle schools can be challenging due to differences in elementary schools and middle schools, such as different implementing factors (C. N. Thomas et al., 2020). RTI for ELLs has had

mixed success because core subject areas must be adjusted to suit learners' needs (Printy & Williams, 2015). However, little is known about effective support for middle school teachers using RTI reading strategies in educating ELLs (Barrio, 2017; Snyder et al., 2017). Without more information, teachers and school leaders may not be effective in helping middle school ELLs reach learning goals (Fisher & Frey, 2018). However, teachers can be more effective when given more information (Whitten et al., 2020).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine what supports middle school teachers perceived they needed to be effective using RTI strategies with ELLs. Although there were studies (Park, 2019; Snyder et al., 2017) about supporting elementary and high school teachers who used RTI intervention with ELLs who were at risk of low academic achievement, researchers had not addressed to middle school teachers.

Research Question

The research question that guided the study was as follows: What supports do middle school teachers perceive they need to be effective in using RTI reading strategies with ELLs?

Conceptual Framework

In this study, the conceptual framework had two components. The first was the RTI framework as described in several sources (Barrio & Combes, 2015; Berkeley et al., 2020; Regan et al., 2015). The second was the concerns-based adoption model (CBAM; G. E. Hall & Hord, 2006). I used the RTI framework and the CBAM stages of concern to design the study and create the interview questions.

The RTI framework was introduced in the IDEA in 2004. RTI is a multitiered framework designed to ensure students who exhibit learning and behavior concerns are provided with academic support. The RTI framework has three levels of instruction: Tiers 1, 2, and 3 (Ockerman et al., 2015). RTI's intervention and multitiered framework was designed to assist students who are academically at risk (Carter-Smith, 2018). RTI enables teachers to provide high-quality instruction and comprehensive examinations of students placed in general education classrooms (Barrio & Combes, 2015). RTI's multitiered service-delivery framework allows educators to (a) formulate evidence-based practices for intervention and measurement, (b) promote the universal screening of students to identify risk and the need for intervention, (c) create many systems of supports, (d) engage in frequent progress monitoring of students' needs or to change a tier of intervention, and (e) add groups to collaborate to enhance program results (Whitten et al., 2020). Educators have used the evidence-based interventions and student data in the instructional layouts of Tiers 1, 2, and 3 (Turse & Albrecht, 2015).

The CBAM is a multitiered approach that consists of three elements (stages of concerns, levels of use, and the innovation configuration); however, in the current study, I concentrated on stages of concern (see G. E. Hall & Hord, 1987). The CBAM assumes a process of personal experiences that can embrace growth and skills (G. E. Hall & Hord, 2006, 2015) and help people consider their experiences that the change they created may raise questions, wherever the change is (G. E. Hall & Hord, 2011). G.E. Hall and Hord's (2006) stages of concern enable those in leadership to recognize their staff members' attitudes and beliefs regarding new initiatives and their level of use. G. E. Hall and Hord

(1987) listed seven stages of concern that may assist teachers with their need for information, assistance, and moral support:

- **awareness***: expresses less concern.*

- **informational***: expresses concern about knowing more.*

- **personal***: expresses personal concerns.*

- **management**: expresses how time is used preparing materials.

- **consequence**: expresses how an individual affects learner and how improvement can be impactful.

- **collaboration**: expresses how one can relate to what they are doing and to what others are doing.

- **refocusing**: expresses thoughts regarding something that would work better.

The CBAM stages of concern can be useful in addressing teachers' attitudes toward change, administration, policymakers, parents, and students, as well as in developing programs and activities, such as PD among educators (G. E. Hall & Hord, 1987). G. E. Hall and Hord (1987, 2011) claimed the stages of concern can be monitored when carrying out a task. Henderson (2018) indicated that the stages of concern can be influential regarding students' academic achievement, staff members' attitudes toward change, or a school culture that is positive, allows staff PD to accommodate their needs, and demonstrates support on behalf of the administration.

Nature of the Study

I used a basic qualitative design for this study (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used open-ended interview questions with eight teachers who had 3 or more years of

experience using RTI in middle schools to address reading curriculum with ELLs across states in the Northeast and Midwest United States. Qualitative research helps promote the understanding of how human beings experience their environment in real-world settings (Yin, 2015). This study fit the purpose of a basic design approach; my aim was to examine the views of the participants to understand their circumstances and perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Lastly, I hand-coded the data to generate themes.

Definitions

In this study, the following key terms were used:

Academic success: The initial academic performance process consists of academic achievement, awareness, abilities, skills acquisition, and continuity retention (York et al., 2015).

Core subjects: Courses for which students receive essential content credit (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2016).

English language learners (ELLs): A linguistically diverse collection of students for whom English is not the main language spoken at home. Other descriptions used for these students are limited English proficiency, students for whom English is a second language, or second language learners (Carter-Smith, 2018).

Middle school(s): Schools with grades not lower than fifth and not higher than eighth (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2016).

Multitiered service: Levels concentrated on high-quality instruction that progresses in stages to measure students' needs (Harlacher et al., 2015).

National Assessment of Educational Progress: The largest national organization that represents a continuous assessment of what U.S. students are familiar with and their abilities in a range of subject areas (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2016).

Professional development (PD): A form of training given to educators to boost pedagogical reasoning (Ghassemieh, 2017)

Response to intervention (RTI): An approach that contains multilevel intervention methods. RTI uses assessment data, progress monitoring, and evidence-based practices to identify students who need academic help and to screen students' progress while students are engaged in targeted interventions. In RTI, students receive adjusted levels or types of responses depending on their responsiveness (Alahmari, 2019).

Assumptions

In this study, I presumed that the participants gave accurate responses when recalling their experiences in administering RTI strategies to support ELLs. I also expected participants who had at least 3 or more years of experience working with ELLs and had engaged in RTI reading interventions to have experience from which they could give substantive responses to the interview questions.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study included the kinds of support middle school teachers perceived they needed in the application of RTI reading strategies with ELLs. I selected teachers who had been engaged in teaching ELLs to take part in the study and did not select educators from the elementary or high school grades. This group of educators was chosen for this study because there was limited research concerning middle school

teachers who work with ELLs to help these students gain academic success. I did not interview teachers of mathematics or other core middle school subjects.

Limitations

Due to the small number of participants, this study's findings were limited in their transferability to other middle school contexts that aspire to engage with ELLs. The study results may be usable for middle school settings. Patton (2015) indicated that limitations in a study can result from a few factors, such as resources, limited participants, or the setting. On a larger scale, because RTI reading is used in middle schools throughout the United States to help ELLs overcome academic difficulties, the findings from this study may inform future research on effective support of RTI reading strategies as well as its effectiveness in middle schools.

Bias may be a limiting factor in a study; however, bias can be limited by asking the right questions, listening, selecting participants equally so no group is excluded, and being observant to not engage the researcher's feelings (Yin, 2015). Ravitch and Carl (2016) indicated that collaboration, articulating clearly, not inserting researcher's emotions into the study, using probing questions to clarify participants' spoken words, and reviewing researchers' biases may create a fresh view in analyzing the experiences of the participants.

My bias had the potential to influence the investigation. I was formally employed in one of the districts where I conducted this study and have an association with some of the staff and students. To decrease bias, I worked with individual participants and avoided personal conversations during the study, such as issues of family matters that had no bearing on the study. I composed interview questions to elicit information from the

participants and ensure participants' information solely represented their perceptions. To further reduce bias, I asked participants the same questions and probes that were included in the interview protocol authorized by my committee.

Significance

The study findings may indicate what kinds of support instructors need when implementing RTI reading strategies with ELLs. Furthermore, the study findings may provide new ideas to support middle school teachers' methods of engaging ELL students in RTI reading. RTI assists with early identification of struggling students to help prevent failure, which can decrease special education referrals (Alahmari, 2019). The current study has the potential to achieve positive social change by creating a pathway for positive ideas that can impact students' academic achievement in reading, particularly with ELLs (see Thomas-Jones, 2017).

Summary

RTI is a multitiered approach used in public schools to assist struggling students. RTI was promoted by IDEA (2004) and the NCLB (2001) and was updated to the ESSA (2015). Scholars have considered RTI as a framework or multitiered approach that assists students who have academic difficulties to obtain help to overcome barriers in subject areas, such as mathematics and reading (Burns et al., 2016). In this basic qualitative study, I examined what support middle school teachers may need when using RTI reading strategies with ELLs. Without a better understanding of teachers' perspectives, middle school ELLs may not reach learning goals. In Chapter 2, I review the literature related to RTI reading, concerns, and support regarding the perceptions of middle school

teachers and ELLs. I also identify the gap in the research this study addressed, the

literature search strategy, and the conceptual framework.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Middle school teachers are faced with finding ways to help ELLs engage in the learning process (Villegas et al., 2018). Some teachers provide help to their students through the RTI framework's intervention strategies (Carter-Smith, 2018). The purpose of the current study was to examine the support middle school teachers may need when using RTI reading strategies with ELLs. The gap that was addressed in the research literature was little information regarding RTI implementation of reading instruction in middle schools with ELLs. In this chapter, I explain the literature search strategy, describe the conceptual framework, and review the empirical research regarding key concepts related to this study.

Literature Search Strategy

I accessed several databases to investigate RTI and reading in middle schools among ELLs and the support teachers may require, including ProQuest, ERIC, Education Source, Google Scholar, Taylor and Francis Online, and SAGE Journals. I also used dissertations and other resources such as the Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services, American Institutes for Research, American Management Association, Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, A National Review of Teacher Preparation Programs, Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association-RMLE Online, IGB Global, Topics in Language Disorders, Fisher Digital Publications, NASSP Bulletin, Intervention in School and Clinic, OSEP National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, Office of Special Education Programs, the NCES, Rti4success, the National Center for Education Statistics, National Clearing House for English Language

Acquisition, and the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development. I also searched the National Assessment Education websites as well the ESSA, U.S. Department of Education, NCLB, IDEA, and the Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth. The search terms used to search the resources were *RTI*, *ESL*, *ELL students*, *middle school*, *teachers*, *perceptions*, *reading strategies*, *support*, *comprehension*, *phonic awareness*, *professional development*, *cultural diversity*, *intervention*, *team meetings*, *collaboration*, *improving*, and *using effective language skills that can lead to fluency among ELLs*.

Conceptual Framework

Two components composed the conceptual framework of this study: the RTI framework as defined by Barrio and Combes (2015), Berkeley et al. (2020), and Regan et al. (2015), and the CBAM (G. E. Hall & Hord, 2006). These two frameworks were used to guide the design of the study along with writing the interview questions.

RTI Framework

RTI is a multitiered framework designed for early identification of and support for students with learning and behavior needs. The IDEA (2004) was introduced to help combat student failure and tackle the concerns school policymakers had after adopting RTI. The RTI framework has three levels of instruction: Tiers 1, 2, and 3 (Ockerman et al., 2015). RTI's direct-approach assessment and intervention multitiered framework was designed to assist students at risk of poor academic achievement (Carter-Smith, 2018) and was introduced by IDEA in 2004. The practice of RTI initiates instructions of and comprehensive assessment of all children in the general education classroom (Barrio & Combes, 2015). The RTI multitiered service-delivery framework helps educators to (a)

formulate evidence-based practices for intervention and measurement, (b) promote the universal screening of students to identify risk and need for intervention, (c) create several systems of supports, (d) engage in frequent progress monitoring of students' needs or to adjust a tier of intervention, and (e) add groups to collaborate to enhance program results (Whitten et al., 2020). Educators use evidence-based interventions and student data in the instructional Tiers 1, 2, and 3 (Turse & Albrecht, 2015).

RTI in middle schools is strategically planned by educators to assist students who exhibit learning and behavioral difficulties (Harlacher et al., 2015). Principals have the greatest interest in guaranteeing that RTI procedures are viable (Printy & Williams, 2015). To increase RTI tier outcomes, policies need to be set and the implementation must be designed to foster success among all students involved in the intervention (King & Coughlin, 2016). In addition, core subject areas must be adjusted to suit learners' needs, and the principal must know how to guide teachers in the fundamental changes that are essential to support their instruction methods (Printy & Williams, 2015).

Numerous researchers have addressed the procedures and strategies in the RTI tiers to expand the adequacy of the multitiered approach and provide full benefits to students (Martin, 2016; Mellard, 2017; Shinn et al., 2016). Middle school educators need to use skilled approaches to move students from one level of RTI to the next for the program to be effective in helping students excel academically (E. S. Johnson & Smith, 2008, 2015; Martin, 2016). In addition, teachers depend on curricular materials and guides so that they are able to use and implement RTI correctly (Ciullo et al., 2016). Instructional guides help the teachers when sufficient time is allocated to problem areas, and evaluation is used to check mastery indicated by an instructional calendar. An

instructional calendar is another method a teacher can use to establish what must be done in the RTI courses and how students should progress. Students can master skills as they advance, and screening is repeated and consistent. Teachers' team meetings are usually structured and consist of repeated examination of data that are useful to identify patterns of teacher outcomes while assessing the intervention periodically (Sarisahin, 2020). In this manner, there can be constant attempts by the instructors to implement the strategies that can promote student achievement (Sarisahin, 2020). Educators can plan, implement, manage, and evaluate each intervention to ensure success. School leaders may play a key role in supporting teachers through these and other strategies and improved resources.

Concerns-Based Adoption Model

I used the CBAM as the conceptual model for this study (see G. E. Hall & Hord, 1987). The CBAM was created to help address the seven stages of concern in the implementation of change in schools (G. E. Hall & Hord, 1987). The model provides procedures when implementing organization change that address personal experiences of participants to promote growth and skills (G. E. Hall & Hord, 2006). In addition, the CBAM is targeted toward people who are considering or experiencing changes and provides a framework to identify these changes (G. E. Hall & Hord, 2011). The stages of concern assist leaders in recognizing individual staff members' feelings and viewpoints regarding a new plan and its level of use (G. E. Hall et al., 2006; G. E. Hall & Hord, 2015). The model is multitiered with three components: the stages of concern, levels of use, and innovation configuration; however, the current study focused on the stages of concern.

The stages of concern were formulated to address seven stages and may be useful for teachers' diverse needs for information, help, and moral provision. According to G. E. Hall and Hord (1987, 2006) these stages include the following:

- **awareness**: expresses less concern.

- **informational**: expresses concern about knowing more.

- **personal**: expresses personal concerns.

- **management**: expresses how time is used preparing materials.

- **consequence**: expresses how an individual affects learner and how improvement can be impactful.

- **collaboration**: expresses how one can relate to what they are doing and to what others are doing.

- **refocusing**: expresses thoughts regarding something that would work better.

The stages of concern can be useful to comprehend teachers' anxiety regarding change, and the stages can be detected during execution of a task at any level before its finishing point (G. E. Hall & Hord, 2011). The stages can also assist with positively influencing student academic achievement, individual staff members' attitudes toward change, positive school climate, PD accessibility, and administrative provision of flexibility and creative methods (Henderson, 2018). The CBAM stages of concern are useful in developing programs and activities, such as PD, among educators (G. E. Hall & Hord, 1987).

G. E. Hall and Hord (1987) stated that change is a cycle, not an occasion, and is profoundly close to personal understanding, which includes formative development of

emotions and abilities and individual concerns that are real. In addition, the stages of

concern characterize human learning and advancement in seven phases through which an

individual's concentration or concern moves in the changes they can consider or in

framing thoughtful questions on whatever the change is. The stages of concerns are

connected by a bridge: The lower stage focuses on oneself, "I" and "me"; the middle

stage focuses on management; and the upper stage focuses on results and impact (G. E.

Hall & Hord, 1987).

Literature Review Related to Key Factors

In this section, I discuss the empirical literature related to implementation of RTI

in middle schools. I also discuss effective support for teachers using RTI, teachers'

perceptions of RTI, structuring RTI interventions, and foundational RTI components for

reading intervention at all tiers.

Effective Implementation of RTI in Middle Schools

In middle schools, an important function of the RTI is to increase academic

growth through ongoing screening and progress monitoring (Fraser, 2018). Raben et al.

(2019) found that RTI was essential in referring children for individual instruction

qualification for LDs. Raben et al. indicated that RTI gave schools a structure for helping

students with learning impediments in the United States. In the academic school years

2003–2004 through 2015–2016, Raben et al. found the number of students receiving

services through RTI stayed consistent and the number of students receiving instructive

intervention increased. Raben et al. further implied that although the number of students

with LDs dropped from 2003 to 2016, the number of children who qualified for other

disability classifications increased. Sharp et al. (2015) also found a connection between

RTI implementation and RTI achievement. After surveying 64 principals and school psychologists at 43 elementary schools, Sharp et al. found that the participants perceived that an information-based dynamic and Tier 3 execution based in trustworthiness could anticipate students' reading results when controlled for demographic indicators. However, in a qualitative study, Barrio et al. (2019) found that RTI implementation in schools in poor rural areas can be challenging to implement when used to close students' academic gaps. Despite the challenges, Barrio et al. claimed that school leaders such as principals can gain insights when collaborating with other leaders who have experience implementing RTI in schools in rural areas.

Effective RTI Implementation With ELL Students

Some types of RTI implementation have been found to be effective with ELL students, such as (a) creating ELLs instruction to help develop literacy, (b) creating an atmosphere that allows middle school teachers to have firsthand knowledge of ELLs' needs, (c) using screening so that assessment of ELLs can be accurate to fit students' needs, (d) maintaining progress monitoring to increase reading fluency, and (e) setting high instruction expectations to provide ongoing support in core instructions (Sharma & Satsangee, 2019). However, though there have been successful attempts to help ELLs, special education has been found to be implemented inconsistently for culturally and linguistically diverse students (Cartledge et al., 2016). Cartledge et al. (2016) indicated that RTI and socially applicable instructional methods were both helpful to culturally and linguistically diverse students' overrepresented in special education programs. For example, RTI was supported by IDEA to help struggling learners achieve academic success when the need was identified through screening and monitoring and when

culturally relevant or social pedagogy was used as an added approach to instruction. Culturally relevant pedagogy uses the three Ws (what, how, and why) that focus on students' personal success collectively. Cartledge et al. further indicated that RTI and culturally relevant pedagogy combined may help culturally and linguistically diverse students.

ELLs may be the fastest growing population in U.S. schools and are composed of different groups, including native-born Americans, with the largest group of ELLs being students who do not speak English (Feliz, 2018). In a study of high-leverage pedagogical practices to increase ELLs' academic achievement, Feliz (2018) found that ELL reading proficiency was essential in supporting English language proficiency. Surveys and interviews with teachers indicated that additional support for reading, including instructional practices such as differentiation, positively affected ELLs' academic achievement.

In a study of ELLs and the RTI process, López and Davis (2019) found that RTI was being used to assist all students, including ELLs, who experienced academic difficulties and qualified for special education services. Lopez and Davis found that RTI was implemented by incorporating consistent time frames within the RTI framework and allotting the time necessary for language achievement in ELLs. For example, the time frame can be a period set aside to develop, adapt, and evaluate instructions and intervention arrangements that could help ELLs.

Middle school teachers' engagement in RTI can be vital to increase academic growth. Ciullo et al. (2016) examined the written reflections of teachers in Grades 6–8 in two states in which school personnel provided interventions in reading inside Tiers 2 and

3. The study findings showed that 12% of the time spent in RTI meetings was for planned, nonacademic exercises. Ciullo et al. indicated that evidence-based interventions communicated guidance and direction, whereas psychological strategy instruction, content improvements, and independent practices were rarely reported. In addition, instructional dissimilarities within the middle schools were demonstrated.

Factors That Support Effective RTI Implementation

Several factors have been found to support effective implementation of RTI for all grade levels, more so in elementary than middle and secondary. These factors include using curriculum-based measures, differentiating or modifying lesson plans, enhancing core curriculum, leveraging teaching practices, and following RTI practices reauthorized by IDEA. In a study of MTSS, Morrison et al. (2020) found that implementation challenges may occur when using RTI and MTSS for instructional practices because attention must be given to how implementation is governed as well as outcomes. Morrison et al. recommended steps must be taken when implementing Tier 1 core instruction, Tier 2 progress monitoring, and Tier 3 intervention where the student may or may not achieve academic growth.

Two studies focused on the efficacy of curriculum-based measures. Rutner (2018) found that using the tiers was helpful when creating a differentiated core curriculum that focused on visuals to reading and writing that could enhance student growth. Curriculum-based measures were strategies educators used to discover how students were advancing in essential academic areas (e.g., mathematics, reading, writing, and spelling). In a study of curriculum-based measures for screening the English language for ELLs, Keller-Margulis et al. (2016) found that curriculum-based measurement was well established for

screening when used with ELLs in many districts. Keller-Margulis et al. indicated that when curriculum-based measurement was used as a validity measure, results showed that there was variance in testing ELLs.

Through differentiated instruction, ELLs can participate in language assistance projects to achieve English capability and meet the academic substance and accomplishment norms that all students need to attain. Investment in these projects can profit students because English proficiency has been related to improved instructive outcomes (NCES, n.d.-b). Puzio et al. (2020) found that with the increase in student diversity, schools and districts need to increase their accountability to improve reading and literacy. Puzo et al. further indicated that teachers can respond by differentiating their instruction, especially in Tier 1 (provided by the general education classroom teacher), on literacy. Differentiated literacy instruction is an effective evidence-based practice at the elementary level, although the most successful approaches include individualization, choice, and an alternate curriculum.

The RTI framework has been evaluated many times to ensure that the framework supports educators' implementation efforts. For instance, scholars at the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs evaluated methods to identify LDs and recommended RTI (Zumeta et al., 2014). In a study of the needs and contradictions in the changing education field regarding RTI, Patrikakou et al. (2016) found that implementation of RTI was mandated in schools across the United States. Counselors were found to be well-situated to hold a position of authority while engaging in training regarding of RTI; however, although most counselors described positive attitudes

concerning RTI, they were limited in their preparation to complete specific RTI tasks (Patrikakou et al., 2016).

In middle schools, the school psychologist is often also part of the RTI process (Aspiranti et al., 2019). Fan et al. (2016) analyzed school psychologists' views regarding the barriers to RTI and found that adjustments of IDEA's unique guidelines for RTI have been used in U.S. school systems. School psychologists also discussed obstructions to viable RTI practice that affected their eagerness to facilitate implementation. Of the 62 school psychologists surveyed regarding state-level competency and accessible time, resources, and support, all participants indicated that availability in preparing, time for supporting RTI implementation, and buy-in were fundamental for effective RTI practice.

Barton et al. (2020) indicated that administrators and others who play a leadership role in schools that implement RTI are on a path to understanding effective RTI implementation based on their knowledge and understanding of the framework and how it can be helpful for at-risk students. Administrators in Barton et al.'s study expressed that their knowledge and understanding of RTI implementation gave them insight into how to best promote students' academic success.

Strategies for Implementing RTI Instruction

It is vital for teachers to have strategies for struggling students, especially to help ELLs overcome reading difficulties (D. I. Rubin, 2016). One such method is a self-regulated process that teachers use to increase instruction. In a study of preservice teacher implementation of an RTI strategy, Chandler and Hagaman (2020) found that middle school teachers used the self-regulated strategy development model to ensure that the implementation of strategy instruction was useful in aiding their students'

comprehension. Mason (2017) also found that the self-regulated model was an effective process to students. The self-regulated model asks students to think before reading, read a section, ask themselves what the passage was about, and put the passage into their own words, thus leading to summarizing. Mason indicated that the self-regulated model evidence-based instructional approach help students gained academic growth.

Teachers must follow RTI instructions to help students achieve academic growth. In a study about instruction guidance for word solving, K. L. Anderson (2019) examined how RTI had changed how schools made education assistance available for learners at risk for reading difficulty. K. L. Anderson discussed a technique to word-solving mandated by the intervention that was successful in circumstances outside of the classroom. For example, K. L. Anderson found that interactive and corroborative code-based and significance-based strategies for considering word-solving can be used in small-group instruction in essential homeroom classrooms. K. L. Anderson also posited that RTI is a promising way to reduce reading difficulties while reducing referrals to special education.

In middle schools, both special education and general education teachers can use certain implementation practices to enhance literacy instruction. Regarding reading comprehension, Wexler et al. (2018) found that both paraprofessional and lead teachers who cotaught English language arts classes integrated literacy activities that supported reading comprehension. Wexler et al. stated that coteaching was a way to have frequent directed content-teacher instructions; for example, the head teacher can assign what the assistant teacher should teach. In coteaching, students with disabilities spend many hours

in their classroom engaging in class activities, sometimes independently, and special education teachers support class activities that are directed by the content teacher.

Scott (2018) conducted a mixed-method study to examine improvement of reading comprehension in middle schools using explicit comprehension model instruction. Scott found that primary-level teachers taught narrative comprehensive skills, whereas middle school teachers taught both narrative and explanatory comprehension skills. Scott further posited that the secondary explicit comprehension model of instruction helped improve the performance of students who had repeated the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness Grade 8 Reading Assessment. The observation notes, teacher survey responses, and pre and posttest results indicated that the secondary explicit comprehension model of instruction was a viable instructional framework that could be used in classroom settings to support middle school educators in effectively teaching reading comprehension skills (Scott, 2018).

Effective Support for Teachers Using RTI

Researchers have studied many approaches to supporting teachers in an attempt to increase effective support for teachers using RTI, such as participation in referral meetings and administrators' support. In a qualitative study, Gomez-Najarro (2020) found that special education and general education teachers could collaborate to use RTI-created methods to help struggling students, especially in schools that assist diverse learners. Gomez-Najarro indicated that RTI training allowed teachers to be engaged and fostered cooperation that enhanced instruction to meet students' academic needs. Moreover, RTI implementation was more successful when teachers were engaged at referral meetings where teachers shared their knowledge and experience to determine

students' academic growth. Such support for teachers was found to enhance teachers' confidence in RTI training in a U.S. state with a higher-than-average number of immigrants because influxes of immigrant families increase government-funded training (Spees et al., 2016). Funded training occurred when states encountered expanded school responsibility under the NCLB and its ongoing replacement of the ESSA. Spees et al. (2016) found that increased numbers of immigrant students positively influenced the academic achievement of limited English proficient youths as a result of increased funding for teacher training.

Professional Development

PD is one strategy frequently used to support teachers. Alahmari's (2019) review and synthesis of research on RTI and educators' roles when implementing RTI components concluded that schools should support teachers through PD. N. L. Smith and Williams (2020) found that PD was ongoing for educators in English language arts and increased their confidence in their abilities to teach literacy skills and strategies. Middle school teachers who have engaged in PD have found it beneficial in increasing understanding of RTI. Bergstrom (2017) found high-quality PD was critical to successful RTI implementation. Likewise, Lane et al.'s (2015) survey of 365 administrators indicated that the administrators needed more information on how to implement RTI and how they may benefit from PD or resources required for all tiers.

Coaching as an aspect of PD was studied by Freeman et al. (2017), who described how coaching was effectively conceptualized and operationalized within a MTSS. Another study on coaching concluded that to focus on RTI implementation, schools must implement a PD system of coaching. For example, March et al. (2018) found that RTI

coaches who were engaged in the RTI process increased support, which was beneficial

for supporting schools that participated in state-level RTI implementation projects.

Howlett and Penner-Williams (2020) conducted a mixed-method study and found that 49

teachers who participated in a 3-day English language proficiency standards PD

workshop were instrumental in assisting K–12 in-service teachers who responded to

ELLs' dual challenges while they were engaged in learning academic English associated

with core subject matters. Howlett and Penner-Williams' findings showed that an

understanding of English language proficiency standards and ongoing training and

collaboration were needed to increase the alignment of contents area standards related to

English language proficiency standards. Benedict et al. (2020) indicated that it was

helpful to combine content-focused lessons in PD training. Benedict's findings indicated

that PD acquainted teachers with new information, whereas lesson study helped teachers

incorporate knowledge into their instruction.

Collaboration

RTI collaboration is another effective approach for supporting teachers. For

example, Griffiths et al. (2020) found that effective collaboration was associated with

students' positive outcomes and a pivotal component of equal education opportunities for

students. Griffiths et al. indicated that though there were challenges, using a building

blocks framework allowed for cooperation to occur. The framework provided a path to

engage teachers as they revisited the foundation of collaborative development that was

necessary to increase students' academic growth.

A coordinated effort between ESL and content-area instructors is needed to

bolster ELLs' academic achievement through content classes (McGriff & Protacio,

2015). The nature and results of such coordinated efforts rely on how professionals are situated inside their school setting and how educators optimize school-based efforts for ELLs with respect to collaboration with instructors. Shideler (2016) conducted a case study in one of the counties in New York and found ELL teachers had realized some factors created barriers to helping ELLs. Curriculum modules, the text, and incorporating the Common Core State Standards were all challenging factors; however, teachers' collaboration helped produced strategies to overcome these factors. Shideler indicated that teachers were able to use data-driven decision strategies to inform their instruction. The data used were based on standards that directly targeted ELLs; for example, asking questions to reveal understanding and revealing the main ideas that lead to critical details that support an explanation of main ideas.

K. Smith (2019) posited that educators using RTI reacted to students' needs. Furthermore, K. Smith indicated that educators who carried out successful instructional guidance of the literacy components for RTI Tier 1 in general education classrooms could improve students' proficiency in reading. K. Smith also postulated that RTI techniques seemed to be a struggle for nonresponsive students, although teachers in elementary and middle schools were hopeful regarding successful implementation. K. Smith indicated that teachers needed more assistance in preparation, data collection, collaboration with other teachers, and time management. Overall, most teachers were pessimistic about RTI and needed training at the high school level.

Team Meetings and Professional Learning Communities

Teachers in middle schools can collaborate in teams to better support learning among ELLs. Effective methods can be achieved through PD, professional learning

communities, and teacher preparation for improved learning outcomes. Furthermore, general education and special education teachers can create coalitions to increase collaboration and learning from each other to increase students' academic achievement (Gebhardt et al., 2015). Brendle (2015) conducted a study of the views of general and special education teachers regarding the usefulness of intervention teams in elementary schools in rural areas. Brendle's study findings indicated that IDEA supported for the RTI-provided research-based interventions for students struggling academically. In addition, efforts to address problem areas were solvable and plans were made to meet struggling students' needs. Principals can support collaboration among teachers by listening carefully. In middle schools, principals' attitudes when leading discussions can be motivational for the whole staff (Nadelson et al., 2020).

Like team meetings, professional learning communities have been found to encourage collaboration and support among teachers and administrators who are organized into smaller groups or teams throughout the school. In a statewide Missouri initiative of 102 elementary schools, 32 middle schools, and 41 high schools, Burns et al. (2018) found that professional learning communities increased collaboration among school personnel to enhance students' academic growth**.** Olivier and Huffman (2016) indicated there is more accountability, trust, and transparency when schools get involved with professional learning communities.

Effective Leadership

In a study of principals' decisions to implement RTI, Printy and Williams (2015) found the schools' plans for implementation depended on the principals' views and consideration of RTI. Printy and Williams found that the principals provided teachers and

other administrators with the necessary motivation and insight for RTI implementation. Similarly, Jensen (2016) studied RTI leadership and found that having diversity and an experienced leadership team was vital to the implementation of RTI in secondary schools. Jensen indicated that teachers at this level of schooling required support and guidance because they encountered many challenges when engaging in RTI implementation; this support and guidance can be offered by administrators, special education teachers, instructional coaches, and guidance counselors responsible for students' day-to-day decisions. Because RTI implementation adheres to various structures, stable leadership is essential (Jensen, 2016). Though RTI has been conducted in the primary grades, it can be challenging once shifted to a higher level of schooling.

In a multicase study, Garcia-Borrego et al. (2020) explored the views of officials in an urban southern Texas border district. Garcia-Borrego et al. revealed that the perceptions of administrators regarding the accepted practices in early literacy accomplishment for underrepresented students, particularly ELLs, showed that teachers, policymakers, and practitioners aimed to improve the literacy accomplishment gap for ELLs before these students finished the early grades. Concerns were addressed as the focus shifted to challenges that surfaced in instruction and instructional interventions.

It is important for teachers to be listened to and given a voice in deciding how students are treated (Meyer & Behar-Horenstein, 2015). For example, Meyer and Behar-Horenstein (2015) found that teachers from a first-grade team needed opportunities for PD as well as encouragement from leadership and resources. Teachers also struggled with implementation of supplemental programs such as RTI, and needed training and support on the most efficient methods to manage the intervention.

Principals can be effective supporters. In a qualitative study, Fraser (2018) found that administrators from rural elementary and middle schools who had experience in RTI implementation were able to share their reflections to help other administrators who were beginning the RTI process. Fraser's six interviewees concluded that guidance and support are useful for new administrators, as well as training in techniques to gain resources, PD, and systems to successfully execute RTI.

Teachers' Perceptions of RTI and Challenges to RTI Implementation

Understanding teachers' views on RTI implementation could be helpful as teachers face challenges implementing RTI. Justice (2020) conducted a qualitative study in a midwestern Oklahoma middle school with 13 sixth-grade through eighth-grade teachers who had 4 years of experience in RTI. The goal of the study was to assess the impact and effect of the RTI programming on students' academic growth while using the context, the input, the process, the product (CIPP) model, and RTI. The CIPP model was created to collect information about a program to measure the strengths and weaknesses in an RTI plan and thus increase the effectiveness. Justice indicated that the teachers perceived inconsistencies in the RTI implementation related to strategic planning, fidelity, and consistency while using CIPP and RTI.

Teachers' perceptions of RTI can contribute new information that can be useful to improve struggling middle school students' growth in reading. In a study of teachers' concerns, Runge et al. (2016) indicated that RTI to address academics or behavior requires data from various sources that are collected and monitored to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions used. Similarly, Duncan (2016) surveyed 33 middle school teachers to gauge their understanding of implementing RTI with fidelity in a rural school

in New Mexico. Duncan indicated that, in secondary schools, there was an attempt to implement RTI that was planned for the elementary level; however, this implementation of RTI was challenging. Duncan's study findings showed that, although RTI may require extra work, teachers must have a positive perception of the RTI program for it to be implemented successfully.

IDEA requires public school teachers to give individualized guidance to students with explicit learning difficulties in RTI reading using a tiered framework to help students overcome academic challenges. However, in a study assessing teachers' concerns about RTI, McKinney and Snead (2017) found that individuals go through a process when implementing new ideas such as RTI. McKinney and Snead indicated that RTI had been used in other states that have different model designs, such as Tennessee, but teachers using these various RTI models had strong concerns based on the model created. McKinney and Snead's study findings revealed that 87 teachers from eight schools in Tennessee voiced their concerns of RTI. Teachers' concerns varied; some teachers expressed that they were not receiving effective data from the Tennessee Department of Education to complete tasks to increase RTI effectiveness. Furthermore, in a study of teachers' perceptions, Y. Anderson (2017) found that extra focus had been put on teachers and administrators to provide interventions for student inadequacy due to federal education instructions and new improvements that led to academic changes. At the same time, general education teachers were critical of engaging in research-based interventions to reverse the decrease in academic achievement (Y. Anderson, 2017).

Teachers working in the educational system are grouped into two main settings: special education and general education. These teachers' roles can be different, but the

duties of each role align to help all students in the classroom. RTI implementation can be difficult despite the teachers' role. In a study examining special education teachers' and general middle school teachers' concerns regarding RTI and struggling readers, C. N. Thomas et al. (2020) directed a focus group to explore their understanding of the RTI reading intervention. As a result, C. N. Thomas et al. discerned three themes: the difficulty of PD, building capacity to implement in middle schools, and leadership. These themes indicated that the practicality of RTI ideas was disappointing to the teachers, and teachers added that they had mixed views on implementing a standard protocol of RTI.

Teachers' perceptions of their confidence in implementing RTI may be an important factor. In a study of RTI factors influencing general education teachers, Stafford (2019) found that there was a need to verify the effects of general education teachers' self-worth to implement RTI. Stafford indicated that high-quality teaching and assessment strategies were at the center of RTI; educators' involvement with actualizing the RTI framework and examining data should also occur to ensure successful implementation in the classroom. In addition, qualified teachers may need to feel equally successful in all teaching circumstances when addressing students' needs because there must be viability of execution of the RTI framework.

Kuo (2015) found that educators expressed some difficulties implementing RTI. Teachers in Kuo's study postulated that certain factors must be considered to have effective RTI implementation, such as data-based decision making, evidence-based intervention at each tier, and a better understanding of teachers' perceptions to inform instruction based on their views. In a study of RTI restructuring, Hollingsworth (2019) found that multitiered systems are designed to target behavioral and academic challenges.

Although the focus is of continuing evidence-based practices on the tiers, Hollingsworth indicated that the RTI program can help teachers address academic and behavioral difficulties. Teachers have found RTI challenging since transitioning to a MTSS and using RTI in middle-level schools. Hollingsworth further indicated that MTSS used in the middle level could be successfully implemented and sustainable. Cavendish et al. (2016) indicated that the RTI framework was created as an early intervention to identify students with learning disabilities; however, the implementation of RTI has presented many challenges, largely from changes in procedures related to monitoring student responsiveness and the components of RTI as well as lack of understanding related to the purpose of RTI to improve students' academic growth while reducing special education referrals.

Teachers' Roles With Instruction of ELLs

Middle school teachers engaged with ELLs have challenges; one of those challenges is working with ELLs who speak a language other than English. In a qualitative study on ESL teachers' views about using reading to motivate ELL students, Protacio and Jang (2016) indicated that although there has been an increase in ELLs in the United States, little is known about how teachers perceive ELLs' motivation to read. Protacio and Jang posited that ELLs teachers' perceived motivation could be increased by using accessible texts, having self-conception of engaging in reading such as having the perception of doing well, and helping the students fit in. In a study on factors that influence students' learning, Hanus (2016) found that factors such as differentiating instructions and collaborating with other mainstream educators to help students overcome language deficiency play a role in students learning English. Hanus indicated that

teachers play a role in assisting students with educational expectations that help raise students' expectations.

Structuring RTI Intervention in Middle Schools

Many factors present themselves in the structure of RTI in middle school. One of these factors is scheduling. In a study of systemic manageability in RTI using intervention-based scheduling, Dallas (2017) found that a scheduled method was used to address the trustworthiness of implementing RTI in the school-scheduled plan. The intervention-based scheduling design held promise as a way to focus on reports that concerned implementing interventions with fidelity. Dallas found that students achieved increased academic success through reading while engaging in instructional, intervention-based scheduled designs. Additionally, students with access to Tier 2 interventions had better developmental rates in reading than those who did not participate in this tier.

RTI instruction in middle school could be beneficial for all students. Gonzalez et al. (2020) indicated that the reading scores of a middle school in a Western state were below average. Though the school struggled to improve student reading scores, a closer examination of the reading program indicated that there could be a clear understanding of the reading program. The program could be more successfully implemented to benefit students if the teachers worked to follow the reading structure program while receiving training.

In contrast, A. P. Johnson (2017) indicated that interventions to address struggling readers must be meaning-based and fostered in a general education setting. RTI has research-based components that guide schools in implementing Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 instruction to create a high-quality classroom; however, these research-based components

depend on the approach and strategies to RTI because the tiers are used to help students achieve academic growth. In addition, scheduling in middle schools can be complicated Warburton (2019) found that RTI had extended its predominance in schools as a technique for helping students according to their responsiveness to the three tiers: general classroom instruction, small group instruction, and individual instruction. Warburton also noted that RTI helped elementary students achieve grade-level benchmarks.

In a study on ELLs and reading instructions, Snyder et al. (2017) found that the efficacy of reading interventions with ELLs in the United States was a pressing challenge, and schools were adapting tiered systems to respond to these academic challenges to help these students achieve academic growth. According to Snyder et al., middle school teachers used many avenues to help ELLs achieve academic growth in reading, such as literacy intervention strategies for support, use of phonics, evidence-based interventions, PD, and team meetings. The use of multilayered interventions for phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and comprehension were important for vocabulary instruction to increase vocabulary outcomes.

In a study of parent involvement, Araque et al. (2017) found that parent engagement in their child's learning was paramount, particularly because immigrant parents may not be knowledgeable of the U.S. public school education system. Still, administrators could encourage parent involvement to increase confidence in the relationship between school and home, especially when their child is placed into RTI. Schiller et al. (2020) indicated that educators in many states hold fast to a MTSS or the RTI framework for improving the features of instruction for all students while observing the needs of students at risk of poor learning results. Although a few educators upheld

reinforcing apparatuses to regulate MTSS or the RTI implementation to the state's expected practices, RTI was another approach states could use to assist districts and schools to evaluate practices. Schiller et al. indicated that states could support districts and schools with data to advance MTSS or the RTI execution.

RTI implementation in elementary schools can be very different from RTI implementation in middle schools. In a study of RTI at the middle school level, Prewett et al. (2012) found that RTI was promoted in elementary schools as a multitiered framework of academic and behavioral interventions. The middle schools in the study began receiving established RTI strategies from the existing elementary frameworks. However, through discussion groups, phone interviews, and site visits, Prewett et al. found that executing RTI created ongoing challenges, such as changes in staffing, curricular realignments, an assortment of screening and progress monitoring related to curriculum, and scheduling changes that would need to be delegated at the secondary and middle school level.

Organization Structure Regarding Roles of Educators

Teachers' and school leaders' views play an essential role in achieving success for all learners. In a study of school administrators' and teachers' perceptions, Gallegos (2017) found that public schools across the United States were having difficulties in achieving success rates for ELLs. According to Gallegos, middle schools in southern U.S. border towns had as many as 89% of Hispanic students with limited English. Although the district where the study was conducted repeatedly attempted to improve student achievement for ELLs in middle school, there needed to be greater diversity in materials for use in the classroom, academic engagement in real-world experience, and promotion

of collaborative efforts with stakeholders such as teachers, parents, families, and the community.

Cowan and Maxwell's (2015) qualitative study revealed that primary grade educators who were involved in RTI impacted student learning despite concerns about how well educators understood RTI. Educators in Cowan and Maxwell's study expressed that modifications were needed to enhance the framework. However, Mahoney et al. (2020) indicated that conditions within a school environment were critical to increase students' academic growth, including connections with the community and emotional learning. However, the role teachers play in implementing RTI is vital to struggling readers. Regan et al. (2015) conducted a study of elementary and secondary educators' perspectives of their school district's RTI activity. The teachers and administrators who were surveyed regarding the attainability and adequacy of instructive practices inside the RTI framework perceived that essential information regarding RTI and the readiness to implement segments of RTI inside their school's district were common within the RTI framework. For example, progressive monitoring and evidence-based instruction were attainable in the classroom and suitable to be executed at the school. Findings showed that RTI implementation could be beneficial to the school's district and teachers, more so at the secondary level due to lack of understanding RTI that was prominent at that level.

Classroom Management

Classroom management in combination with RTI can be instrumental in fostering learning in the classroom. In a study of educators' views of classroom management, Oakes et al. (2020) found that schools were embracing tiered systems to counteract and take action regarding students' scholarly conduct, such as student behavior and social

needs. Educators used the foundation of the tier system to execute instructional procedures and high-quality classroom management. The 61 middle school educators confirmed that they had been highly trained and engaged in positive classroom management preparation and strategic instructions (Oakes et al., 2020). Conversely, Paramita et al. (2020) found that, although classroom behavior management was an essential skill for teachers, teachers reported that they had inadequate preparation to effectively address student behavior. Paramita indicated that professional training regarding classroom behavior and managerial skills was ongoing and required to help educators execute proof-based management practices. Projects that were centered on preparing teachers on certain strategies, such as how to conduct praise recognition or proactive behavior management plans, were critical to develop high-quality subject matter for teachers engaged in professional preparation that required expected outcomes.

For middle school teachers to use best practices in classroom management, it can be helpful to ensure that ELLs engage in high-quality RTI reading to promote effective learning. In a study on classroom management, Sebastian et al. (2019) found that classroom management continued to be a significant matter for teachers. Sebastian et al. indicated that although evidence-based classroom management practices existed, teachers did not receive the training and assistance needed to implement the practices. Findings showed that teachers who were trained in classroom management strategies positively influenced student outcomes. Similarly, in a qualitative study of teachers' perceptions of classroom management preparedness, Ellis (2018) found that poor student conduct could interrupt classroom activities and inhibit the flow of instruction. Ellis noted that teachers at a local middle school lacked effective classroom management strategies and had to

focus on disruptive student behaviors that obstructed their ability to teach. PD preparation programs were planned to enhance teachers' awareness of classroom management methods to help them effectively manage their classrooms.

Foundational RTI Components and Strategies for Reading Intervention at All Tiers

RTI could be helpful for struggling readers when used in reading classes in middle schools. Middle school teachers could use the various strategies to address literacy to benefit ELLs students at all tiers. Unlike at the elementary level, RTI components for reading can be used in core subjects to enhance learning.

ELLs are required to meet academic standards in core subjects; thus, ELLs can benefit from academic standards established to increase literacy in core subjects, such as English language arts and science. August et al. (2016) found that the Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards helped students understand and produce academic language in English language arts and science. August et al. indicated that the content courses of vocabulary instruction and embedded vocabulary instruction were enlightening; however, vocabulary was a critical domain of academic language, and ELLs went to the English language arts classroom with limited English vocabulary compared to those with English proficiency. Additionally, ELLs who met English language arts and science literacy requirements had an increased academic vocabulary overall. Thirty teachers in 18 schools in a large high-need district in the southwestern United States indicated that both instruction methods; vocabulary instruction and embedded vocabulary instruction helped ELLs obtain general academic and explicit vocabulary.

Teaching literacy to middle school students can be demanding. In a case study of RTI in middle schools, Kelley (2016) found that RTI was helpful for students in the primary grades. Kelley indicated that there were barriers preventing middle schools from adopting elementary RTI practices needed for an all-inclusive literacy program that could allow students to meet academic core standards. For example, in middle schools, a plan must be developed to address academic standards and allow students to master core standards of RTI. Teachers in Kelley's study indicated that their PD emphasized RTI and the workshop presentations were helpful, but they required commitment from all teachers and administrators.

Enhancing Phonemic Awareness and Phonics

IDEA (2004) requires states to recognize students at risk for reading challenges. Reading instructors should provide explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, systematic phonics instruction, methods to improve fluency, and ways to enhance comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000). Bowers and Bowers (2017) indicated that reading instruction gives emphasis to phonics, and that instruction could help students understand spellings formed around word structure, the origin of a word and historical development, and phonology or the relationships among speech sounds that constitute the fundamental components of a language.

Strategies for ELLs' literacy include promoting phonemic awareness and phonics (Snyder et al., 2017). Henbest and Apel (2017) indicated that phonics instruction benefits encoding and structural awareness because phonics instruction that is clear and systematic could be effective for teaching word reading to young and struggling readers. Additionally, encoding benefits early reading instruction. Henbest and Apel's findings

indicated that clear instruction in these areas benefitted word reading skills in young

readers. Pantito (2020) indicated that reading strategies such as summarizing and

scanning of the text are helpful to include in teachers' developed reading techniques.

Pantito's findings showed that teachers help students develop advanced knowledge in

critical reading skills when using these tools. Pantito further indicated that students and

teachers could benefit by increasing learning and reading fluency, such as skimming,

scanning, and summarizing.

Effective Comprehension Strategy

In an assessment of a standardized evaluation of reading comprehension among

ELLs and middle school students fluent in English on two text genres (e.g., informational

and narrative), Homand and Moughamian (2017) found that ELLs may not receive

satisfactory support to meet the requirements of the Common Core State Standards.

Although ELLs had lower reading comprehension scores than their English-fluent peers

in both genres, with the lowest scores in informational text, Homand and Moughamian's

findings indicate there is still a need to use assessments while choosing specific genre-

based reading interventions to help improve ELLs' comprehension results.

Another aspect of comprehension is using sight words and coding and decoding.

Sight words as a strategy are typically used in the elementary grades because sight words

are a crucial element of reading comprehension. In a study of academic vocabulary,

Gallagher et al. (2019) found that academic vocabulary presents unique challenges for

students and should be emphasized during instruction. Teachers should focus on

academic vocabulary instruction, especially for students from various language

backgrounds. Gallagher et al. also indicated that English monolingual students did

improve their knowledge of words when taught academic vocabulary, whereas emergent bilingual students were less likely to benefit from academic vocabulary instruction.

Coding and decoding have ties in cultural pedagogy and communication. In a study of reading and writing in academic literacy development, Grabe and Zhang (2016) found a connection between reading and writing and academic learning. Grabe and Zhang indicated that reading–writing could include intellectual reading abilities, academic writing strengths, reading to write, writing to read, reading, and writing to acquire knowledge, and reading and writing to synthesize and evaluate. Further, reading was classified as input for writing, and reading comprehension was treated as relatively unproblematic; however, these tasks could become problematic when exploring reading–writing relations among ELLs.

Though middle school teachers help ELLs adapt to speaking proficient English, reading English is also important for ELLs (Ali & Razali, 2019). In a study of reading strategies for teaching reading comprehension among ELLs, Ali and Razali (2019) found that reading strategies such as predicting, analyzing, and summarizing enhanced participants' communication. Ali and Razali further indicated that building a connection between the reader and the text's written information is confusing for ELLs. In addition, certain concerns hindered these students from improving and developing their reading comprehension. Still, teachers can use instruction methods during reading exercises to enhance ELLs' use of reading approaches.

Summary and Conclusion

Research articles have addressed ELLs, often called ESL students, in the United States. RTI has been promoted by IDEA (2004) to assist students with reading

difficulties. Reading difficulties can be mistaken for a LD; thus, it is critical that teachers in middle schools be given the tools to assist ELLs. In this literature review, I demonstrated that middle school teachers are faced with finding ways to help ELLs overcome reading difficulties. In comparing articles on implementing RTI, a gap emerged regarding RTI support needed when using RTI reading strategies with ELLs. Therefore, without more understanding on the part of teachers, middle school ELLs may not reach their learning goals.

Prior study findings indicated that usage of RTI in middle schools have not delivered 100% achievement, and the RTI program is not creating the achievement it was intended to accomplish. Teachers' descriptive reports on RTI reading strategies and how modifications can be implemented to achieve academic achievement can be communicated in PD sessions. Middle school teachers should have clear awareness of RTI reading strategies that could be updated to effectively implement RTI; this awareness is fundamental to students' growth (Alahmari, 2019). To effectively implement RTI reading tiered instruction in the classroom, teachers must follow steps to correctly implement RTI (Sebastian et al., 2019). In Chapter 3, I introduce the research methodology used to direct the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine what support middle school teachers may need using RTI reading strategies with ELLs. In this chapter, I discuss the research design and methodology, my role as the researcher, how the data were collected and analyzed, and ethical issues.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question addressed in this study was as follows: What supports do middle school teachers perceive they need to be effective in using RTI reading strategies with ELLs? The key phenomenon of this study was RTI reading supports middle school teachers perceive are effective or needed with middle school ELLs. I used the RQ to guide this basic qualitative study. Qualitative designs enable the researcher to explore the experiences of participants and discover the meaning of those experiences through open-ended interview questions (Patton, 2015). Basic qualitative studies focus on discerning the views of participants and understanding their perceptions regarding the circumstances connected to the phenomenon of study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the current study, a basic qualitative design was appropriate because I was determining what supports middle school teachers perceive they need to be more effective using RTI strategies with ELLs.

I did not choose a phenomenological design, which focuses on how individuals used their experiences and processed them into a part of their consciousness (see Vagle, 2018). Vagle (2018) explained that phenomenological inquiry is intended to explore an individual's way of being, becoming, and moving through the world and that living is an ongoing process. Although the participants in the current study were asked to recall and discuss their experiences during the interviews, private and personal experiences were not

the focus of the study; instead, I focused on participants' perceptions of RTI support in reading strategies in middle school with ELLs. Patton (2015) indicated that phenomenology is focused on individuals' meaning at the quintessential element of the human experience; however, the research problem for the current study was more pragmatic.

I did not select a case study as my research design because I did not analyze a bounded situation that occurred over time through comprehensive, in-depth data collection from one or more groups (see Patton, 2015). Although both phenomenology and case study approaches could have been used in this study, I chose a basic qualitative design to address middle school teachers' day-by-day engagement with RTI reading strategies and engagement with ELLs, and how their experiences have led them to perceive regarding needed support.

The basic qualitative design was chosen to address concerns regarding RTI. I did not select grounded theory as a research design because such an investigation requires extensive time and resources (Patton, 2015). When using grounded theory, researchers must build a general solid process that is grounded in participants' perspectives (Creswell, 2009) and contains an unequivocal assemblage of proof (Yin, 2015). Grounded theorists develop a theory from information that is deliberately obtained and examined using reasonable investigation (Chun Tie et al., 2019). Finally, I did not choose to engage in a narrative inquiry because this design allows the researcher to interpret a person's life and culture chronicles that reveal an individual's story and reality (see Patton, 2015). Based on my knowledge of education, I used a design that allowed me to

examine the perceptions of several middle school teachers engaged with RTI reading strategies and ELLs.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher and the instrument in the study included (a) interviewing all participants regarding their perceptions of support in RTI reading strategies in a middle school setting and (b) performing data analysis. As a former educator from a school district in the East United States who provided guidelines to students in middle schools who were members of RTI classes, my objective was to interview middle school teachers who had at least 3 years of experience engaging with RTI reading strategies with middle school ELLs. I aimed to obtain a clear view of what support middle school teachers perceived they needed to be more effective using RTI strategies with ELLs.

To avoid researcher bias, I maintained a strategic distance from personal conversations or discussions with participants and behaved professionally. I addressed any personal bias(es) by following a predetermined plan. For example, I exchanged individual telephone numbers only for the purpose of engaging in conversation with staff members about the study. I did not reveal who participated in the study to other staff members. I also followed the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines regarding the consent form, privacy, when to contact participants, and how to conduct myself. I followed legal guidelines, standards, and ordinances for using participants in a study (see Check et al., 2014). In addition, I used an interview protocol (see Appendix) to guide the interview.

Methodology

The focus of this basic qualitative study was middle school teachers' views on support when using RTI reading strategies with ELLs. I selected participants from my personal Facebook page and recruited teachers from my educational Facebook groups. This selection was done purposefully because of COVID-19. Purposeful sampling helped me select participants who would best understand the problem and RQ (see Creswell, 2009). This type of participant selection yielded rich data on the phenomenon under study (see Palinkas et al., 2015). In addition, adding clarity to the subjective investigation gives accountability to the findings to reduce bias (see Palinkas et al., 2015). The methodology shaped the approach to the methods that were used in the study.

Participation Selection Logic

The sample population for this study was eight middle school teachers who were engaged with RTI reading strategies with ELLs. This number of participants was sufficient to achieve data saturation regarding participants' perspectives of support when using RTI reading strategies with ELLs. I used my Facebook educational group page to recruit participants during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants were purposefully selected after I sent out an invitation letter to middle school reading teachers in the Midwest and Northeast United States. Messages sent through the internet are valuable when participants are challenging to reach (Yin, 2015). All participants had knowledge of engaging in RTI reading strategies with ELLs and had 3 plus years of experience helping ELLs who were using the intervention.

Of those who responded to my invitation, I selected eight teachers to participate in the study. I asked the participants to sign a consent form and return it indicating "I

consent" and that they agreed to participate in the interview. I sent consenting

participants a welcome letter via email. Participants were given the option to be

interviewed via phone or Zoom, and all participants chose to be interviewed by Zoom.

Each participant and I agreed on a date and time to conduct the interview. I informed the

participants that their responses would be recorded and that an interview transcript would

be made available to them after 7 days to check for accuracy of their spoken words.

Instrumentation

I used open-ended interview questions to collect data from the participants. The

interview protocol (see Appendix) consisted of questions based on the conceptual

framework and the RQ, both of which were supported by the empirical literature. I used

probes to further solicit responses from the participants. An interview protocol assists

researchers in using limited time with well-crafted questions (Patton, 2015). In addition,

researchers can use a semistructured interview approach to gain insights into a topic by

organizing several questions before engaging in talks with participants (Patton, 2015).

Recruitment

The internet, which has capabilities such as email and social media, was valuable

in contacting participants who were hard to reach through other communication methods

(see H. J. Rubin & Rubin, 2012). For example, I was not able to visit the schools or

district offices during the period of the COVID-19 lockdown because educators were

busy teaching students online and many were experiencing overwhelming challenges due

to being absent from the classroom. I located my sample participants using my Facebook

educational group page. Then, I sent an invitation via email to the potential participants;

this invitation included a concise description of the study to be conducted. I followed up

with participants after 3 days and 5 days if I did not receive a response. I checked my email daily. I had also planned to follow up after 2 weeks, but all potential participants responded before 2 weeks had passed. After I received the replies, I began the selection procedure and informed the teachers whether they were chosen to participate. All participants had the opportunity to read and sign or reply to a consent form.

Data Collection

For this study, I was expected to interview eight to 12 middle school teachers with 3 years or more of experience teaching RTI reading in middle schools to ELLs. The process of seeking participants began after I was cleared to begin the study by the Walden University IRB. I obtained IRB approval on March 12, 2021; the study number was 03-12-21-0461072, and this approval will expire on March 11, 2022. In the consent form, participants agreed to be audio recorded. The interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes. Afterward, I thanked participants for participating in the study. I took field notes to keep track of what was accomplished as I proceeded with interviewing participants. I also kept a reflective journal throughout the interviewing process. I triangulated data to ensure the study's credibility by comparing interview field notes with the interview data. This technique helped me conduct an overall inductive and comparative analysis of the data.

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis began with listening to taped interviews repeatedly and viewing my field notes. I created a matrix of participants' spoken words to sort themes that were related to the literature. This process was repeated as I hand-coded participants' responses and assembled them according to wording similarities (see Saldaña, 2016). The participants' verbally expressed words provided an enlightening description of the

phenomenon, which minimized researcher bias (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I

continued my data analysis by hand-coding participants' responses and to answer the RQ,

discerning a smaller number of themes from those categories.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is vital in a qualitative study because it enables the study to be

reasonable, legitimate, and significant to all involved (Patton, 2015). Although it may not

be sufficient to seek data from a targeted group, the information collected should be

trusted. I established trustworthiness by creating an organizing system of the transcript

and analysis of the contents. In addition, I reflected on my background to acknowledge

any bias that may have hindered the outcome of the interview and any examination of the

data.

Credibility

To ensure credibility in a qualitative study that speaks to what is done in an

investigation, the researcher should minimize bias and cross-check and authenticate all

data received (Patton, 2015). I took steps to ensure that all information received was

accurate; for example, I ensured that the interviews were correctly transcribed using

transcript checking, and I used data triangulation to help avoid bias. I also reviewed the

data shared by the participants and used their words and insights to examine the

perspectives of middle school teachers regarding needed support with RTI reading

strategies with ELLs. Credibility requires the accuracy of data; therefore, the researcher

must convey what was shared by participants and guarantee the interview recordings and

transcripts are correct (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Transferability

Transferability occurs when the research findings can be generalized and transferred to a broader context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher's role is to present the contents of the study using the participants' words, secondary sources, and other significant information from the emerging themes to explain the importance of the investigation (Saldaña, 2016). Transferability in qualitative research can interact with participant encounters, and that can aid in the transmitting of factors to extend disclosures (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Transferability occurs if thick findings emerge from the data while considering participants' wording. In the current study, I rechecked participants' information to ensure that the data aligned with what participants shared in the interviews.

Dependability

I double-checked all data to ensure that they were consistent with the participants' spoken words. In addition, I used reflexivity to guarantee the obtained data and the research questions aligned with the purpose of the study. This strategy helped with triangulation and ensured that all data were accurate. Reflexivity is the researcher's reflection concerning areas of significance in a study and involves data examination, instrument refinement, how the exploration questions are addressed, and research bias (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Confirmability

Confirmability in a qualitative study is based on a lack of researcher bias and subjectivity and the ability for emerging data to be corroborated (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To avoid bias, I focused on participants' responses and checked that the transcripts of

participants' responses were accurate. I cross-checked emerging themes after creating a matrix of participants' spoken words to avoid bias.

Ethical Procedures

To support ethical practices, I contacted participants via my Facebook educational group in a way that avoided any coercion. After receiving IRB permission to perform this study, I sent the selected participants an email to inform them of the study procedures. The participants were informed of their rights and were asked to sign a consent form prior to their involvement in the study. All participants had the opportunity to opt out of the study before it began; however, none of the participants opted out.

For security purposes, all data were stored on a flash drive rather than on a laptop or in Dropbox. The information in the single flash drive will be destroyed after 5 years from the completion of this study. The data will remain confidential and safeguarded at my residence.

Summary

In this study, I used a basic qualitative design and interviewed eight middle school teachers who had at least 3 years of experience providing RTI to ELL students. I collected data from participants via Zoom interviews. Then, I analyzed the data by hand-coding to develop themes. I took steps to insure trustworthiness and ethical procedures throughout the study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine what support middle school teachers might need when using RTI reading strategies with ELLs. I interviewed middle school teachers who had 3 or more years of experience teaching RTI reading to ELLs to determine what support teachers perceived to be effective when using RTI reading strategies with ELLs in middle schools. The research question that guided the study was as follows: What supports do middle school teachers perceive they need to be effective in using RTI reading strategies with ELLs? Reflected in the interviews was a definition of RTI as a method of identifying struggling students and providing them with individualized instruction to help increase academic growth. RTI is a method of systematically tracking progress and offering additional assistance to children who require it.

In this chapter, I review the study setting, participant demographics, and study procedures. In addition, I describe the data collection process and the data analysis. I then discuss verification of trustworthiness before presenting the study results.

Setting

The participants had taught at middle schools in the Northeast to Midwest United States. Participants were recruited through social media. I conducted each interview in one sitting, and participants chose the interview time and date. During the data collection period, the COVID-19 pandemic had affected many teachers, so I used Zoom to interview participants to avoid spreading the virus.

Demographics

All eight participants were women; one was American Indian, three were African American, one was Caribbean American, and three were White. Participants were age 35 and older. Two participants were classroom teachers who were recently promoted to RTI directors, and two participants had over 10 years of engaging with RTI and continued to work as a teacher within the school district. Another participant had 17 years as an RTI director, whereas the other three participants had been engaging in RTI for 3 to 6 years. Each participant was given a pseudonym: Ai, Anna, Centra, Dana, Fawn, Lisa, Nancy, and Vetta. All participants were actively working in their school districts. See Table 1 for pseudonyms and years of service. Some demographic information was excluded from Table 1 to maintain confidentiality.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Participant's pseudonym	Service
Ai	3 years RTI director
Anna	3 years RTI director
Centra	10 years RTI teacher
Dana	10 years RTI teacher
Fawn	17 years combined RTI teacher and principal
Lisa	10 years RTI teacher and 1-year RTI director
Nancy	6 years RTI teacher
Vetta	8 years RTI director

Data Collection

I gained approval from the Walden University IRB and began recruiting participants through my Facebook educational groups and used Facebook Messenger as a form of communication. I sent out my initial invitation to the first three educational

groups and received two participants the first week. After the third day, I sent out a reminder invitation to the same educational groups and received another two participants. I repeated the process with two more educational groups the next month and received four more participants. I had a fifth day reminder invitation prepared, but I did not need to use it because enough participants had volunteered. In total, I accepted eight participants through my Facebook educational groups, which was enough to reach data saturation. Participants emailed their contact information, and I responded by sending participants the consent form before beginning the study. Participants emailed back the words "I consent" to demonstrate their consent before starting the study. This process of recruiting and interviewing took 8 weeks because I chose to move slowly in the beginning to reflect on the interviews as I completed them.

After participants consented, each participant and I agreed upon a date to conduct the interview. Although I offered participants the option to interview by phone, all participants chose to interview via Zoom. I sent a Zoom link to participants to conduct the interview, and each interview lasted 45 to 60 minutes, except for the initial interview, which lasted 25 minutes. I used Zoom to audio record all eight interviews; however, I also used a recording device as a backup in case mechanical difficulties occurred while using Zoom. I interviewed participants in a quiet room in my home so others could not hear the conversation, and I urged participants to do the same.

Before the interview, each participant shared their name, length of time participating in RTI, and how long they had been teaching at their school. Next, participants answered the interview questions, including the probes that followed each question. Participants were given an opportunity at the end of the interview to add further

insights they thought were helpful. I did not make any changes to the study procedures outlined in Chapter 3.

Data Analysis

All recordings were transcribed using Otter.ai and uploaded to a Microsoft Word document. After conducting the eight interviews. I created a matrix and noted the similar phrases conveyed by the participants and used colors to highlight matching codes. Then, I examined the frequency of phrases and experiences addressed by the participants to determine the similarities and differences in the topics discussed. The codes I derived were as follows: *a response to intervention*, *students, tiers, reading, child, principal, parents, learning, teach, paperwork, teacher, strategies, meetings, teaching, plan, support, concerns, ELL teacher, classroom, fluency, comprehension, middle school, syllables, class, repeating, test, language, progressing, words, instructions, engagement, curriculum, work, decoding, phonics, system, based, investing, lesson, monitor, guided reading, developmental, grade, content, participate,* and *intervention*. Only two teachers mentioned the stigma of receiving RTI help for middle school students (see Table 2 for examples of codes and themes and subthemes from the data analysis sheet).

Table 2

Examples of Codes and Themes and Subthemes

Code	Theme and subtheme
Strategies, teacher, curriculum, lesson, response to intervention, teach, instruction, investing, reading	Theme 1: Teachers need and use effective teaching strategies for RTI reading instruction
Middle school, intervention, monitor, developmental, plan, words, instruction, reading, strategies, teaching	Subtheme (a): Effective use of instructional tools
Students, reading, fluency, middle school, intervention, work, system, based classroom, teacher, child, developmental, classroom, grade	Subtheme (b): Teachers' instructional needs and challenges during the pandemic to help ELLs acquire more fluency
Monitoring, instruction, strategies, reading, classroom, tiers, curriculum	Subtheme (c): Teachers need and used RTI curriculum implementation strategies in their middle school classroom
Guided reading comprehension, decoding, phonics, repeating, test, teaching	Subtheme (d): Teachers use literacy methods to increase ELLs' academic growth
Response to intervention, students, middle school, ELL, principal, engagement, meeting, support, teach, tiers, work, intervention, participate	Theme 2: Teachers need support and collaboration with leaders and peer teacher
Paperwork, syllables, class, classroom, learning RTI, teach, middle school, intervention, tiers, ELL teacher, plan, principal, monitor, teaching	Theme 3: Teachers need PD and training to address RTI
Parents, students, paperwork, concerns, learning, progressing, school, intervention, support, investing, lesson, child, principal, response to intervention	Theme 4: Teachers need the administration to know what concerns they have about ELLs middle and RTI reading

After creating the matrix, I mapped out four themes and four subthemes related to the

research question. Themes and subthemes that addressed the RQ were as follow:

1. Theme 1: Teachers need and use effective teaching intervention strategies to

   support RTI reading instruction.

   - Subtheme 1: Effective use of instructional tools.

   - Subtheme 2: Teachers' instructional needs and challenges during the

     pandemic to help ELLs acquire fluency.

- Subtheme 3: Teachers need and use RTI curriculum implementation strategies in their middle school classroom.

- Subtheme 4: Teachers use literacy methods to increase ELLs academic growth.

2. Theme 2: Teachers need support and collaboration with leaders and peers.

3. Theme 3: Teachers need PD and training to address RTI.

4. Theme 4: Teachers need the administration to know what concerns they have about ELLs and RTI reading.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To increase the credibility of the data collected for this basic qualitative study, I interviewed eight participants who were engaged in RTI reading with ELLs for 3 or more years in middle schools. To further increase trustworthiness, I forwarded the participants their interview transcripts and asked each participant to review their transcript for accuracy. Additionally, when probing participants spoken words, I considered other justifications, views, and themes to avoid assumptions about a participant's meaning of spoken words (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition, to increase trustworthiness, I addressed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

I increased credibility by ensuring that each participant understood the consent form and inclusion criteria. After interviewing, I sent each participant their interview transcript and asked them if there was anything they would like to change or add. Participants were asked to return their changes within 7 days; all eight participants agreed that the transcripts were accurate. Transcript review, along with my review of my notes

and listening repeatedly to the interview recordings, assisted with triangulation of the data and helped me avoid bias. Patton (2015) stated that it is the responsibility of the researcher to minimize bias and cross-check and authenticate all data received. In this study, I achieved credibility by asking participants to guarantee that the recording and transcript were correct (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Transferability

I ensured transferability by providing a detailed description in the layout of the data analysis to inform the reader of a step-by-step approach that could be used in a broader context (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I gave a clear description of the study's setting to highlight how the study unfolded, and I described how I conducted and recorded Zoom interviews. I also described how I connected emerging themes to explain the importance of the investigation (see Saldaña, 2016).

Dependability

I double-checked all data to increase dependability. In addition, I used reflexivity to ensure the obtained data and the research question aligned with the purpose of the study and the procedures detailed in Chapter 3, which helped with data triangulation and ensured that the collected data were accurate. All data were examined, the study instrumentation was explained, and the research question was answered to ensure the study could be replicated.

Confirmability

I established confirmability by keeping a record of the interviews and data analysis process while recognizing my biases. My bias was having knowledge of RTI while working in one of the school districts; to reduce bias, I wrote the interview

questions to seek participants' information so that the information would represent their views. Also, I asked participants to check their responses to ensure accuracy. Emerging themes were cross-checked by creating a matrix of participants' spoken words.

Results

This section includes the results of the study as themes and subthemes that emerged from the data analysis. Themes and subthemes are depicted using excerpts from the interviews. All themes addressed the single RQ: What supports do middle school teachers perceive they need to be more effective in using RTI reading strategies with ELLs? Four themes emerged from the data.

- Theme 1: Teachers need and use effective teaching intervention strategies to support RTI reading instruction.

- Theme 2: Teachers need the support and collaboration with leaders and peers.

- Theme 3: Teachers need PD and training to address RTI.

- Theme 4: Teachers need the administration to know what concerns they have about ELLs and RTI reading.

Theme 1: Teachers Need and Use Effective Teaching Intervention Strategies to Support RTI Reading Instruction

All participants shared that they needed support when using the RTI reading strategies with ELL middle schoolers. The participants also reported that they applied effective intervention strategies while desiring additional support. The kinds of strategies that they needed and used to support RTI reading instruction were discussed in relation to four subthemes: (a) effective use of instructional tools, (b) teachers' instructional needs

and challenges during the pandemic to help ELLs acquire fluency, (c) teachers need and used RTI curriculum implementation strategies in their classroom, and (d) teachers used literacy methods to increase ELLs' academic growth.

Subtheme: Effective Use of Supportive Instructional Tools

Teachers increased their use of intervention strategies that supported RTI reading instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic and virtual teaching. The teachers described using I-Ready, Lexia, and Read 180 to scaffold the differentiated lesson tiers of the RTI framework, personalize the instruction, and help students achieve academic success in RTI. Participants referred to these interventions as comprehensive strategic systems that included online intervention software as a primary instructional tool to develop practical reading lessons. These intervention programs included core reading curricula, and teachers described these programs as detailed and helpful in organizing the scope and sequence of lessons in which students with specific ability levels were taught. All eight participants used RTI reading intervention programs for ELLs, such as screening, monitoring, creating support, differentiated lessons, and grouping students in small groups; however, all participants expressed the need for additional instructional activities for literacy. For example, Anna shared that ELLs in her class function near to grade level in reading.

Many of the participants reported that their school districts have become creative and have adopted ways to enhance the RTI framework through different comprehensive systems, which were often called intervention programs, to ensure effective use. As a result, teachers could have effective supportive instructional tools to assist ELLs in

achieving academic success. Ai provided an example of how she used Lexia as a support

to assist ELLs in RTI reading and to monitor and differentiate instruction:

> There are effective teaching strategies used to address RTI reading after rigorous
>
> monitoring, and you must have differentiating lessons to give more time to
>
> enhance critical thinking. And teaching the ELLs in small groups and doing
>
> differentiated learning…made it a little bit easier for the students. Also, using
>
> different curriculum through comprehensive reading research programs like Lexia
>
> for students using passages helped calibrate the student mistakes. Like [Lexia]
>
> would calculate for you the reading speed to understand how critically they were
>
> thinking about the passage.

To help guarantee effective teaching in RTI reading classes, six of the eight

participants expressed that they used the same program as other teachers in their building

to help with the ELLs' curriculum instruction for reading. These programs included I-

Ready, System 44, and Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), also called

Sheltered Instruction. For example, Lisa—one of the RTI directors—talked about using

comprehensive strategic instruction through supportive interventions, such as I-Ready, to

support ELLs engaged in RTI:

> In my school, I and the other teachers use the I-Ready reading program. We took
>
> the students' reading deficits that they were struggling most with, and we focused
>
> on that skill. With I-Ready, we utilized the teachers' reading toolbox and the
>
> instructions. We read over and found lessons for students to focus on their skills.
>
> We also used Easy CBM, a curriculum-based measure used to test a specific skill

of the ELLs. We practiced that skill, and at the end of the week, we pulled a test

from Easy CBM and tested the ELLs on that specific reading skill.

Vetta, an RTI director, explained how I-Ready helped her address specific areas of RTI

reading with ELLs:

The support is I-Ready, in our school; the teachers used a couple of reading

strategies from the program. I -Ready [includes] a diagnostic test to help ELLs

with authors' point of view. After assigning work in that specific area, you do

small grouping and then monitor to see if they had mastered it or not.

Fawn, an RTI director of 17 years, explained that in her school district, teachers use I-

Ready to assist ELLs in reading. Fawn also explained that the intervention program was a

form of support.

The school district and the teachers use the I-Ready reading program as support to

help the ELLs with skills and deficits. The I-Ready reading program lessons

captured what the students needed and that the school district uses a Can-Do

Descriptor WIDA Screener, that is, an English language proficiency assessment

for new students, to help educators identify ELLs, and what they could

accomplish. The multi-tiered level, always worked really well for RTI to get to

the root of the data-driven decisions …we monitored ELLs' progress and then

used the screening, diagnostics, and progress monitoring as well.

Centra, one of the RTI teachers, explained that she used the I-Ready reading

program because it helped her address the RTI tiers. Nancy asserted that "SIOP, I-Ready,

and Read 180 assisted ELLs in developing literacy." Similarly, Dana explained how the

comprehensive strategies were useful as supportive tools for teaching RTI tier instruction

and assisting ELLs in her school district. Dana elaborated on the ELLs' and other students' experiences of the program:

> In my school district in the Midwest, ELLs and struggling readers go under a system called Success for All (SFA) that addressed reading—For example, in the middle school we also started using what is known as System 44, a designed support used to assist teachers, in particular, instructional and developmental needs of older struggling readers, along with Read 180, a reading intervention program that helps the teacher with ELLs whose reading was below grade level. Together, these two programs were connected under the same umbrella, although they served two different purposes. . .I do have many ELLs, so [System 44] makes it easy to use to test the kids. The computer-based program allowed for all students to be taught together, but once the ELLs were on their computers, they could receive individualized instruction based on their reading ability.

Subtheme: Teachers' Instructional Needs and Challenges During the Pandemic to Help ELLs Acquire Fluency

Seven of eight participants indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic affected the 2020–2021 school year because reading instructional strategies for ELLs had to be implemented online. For instance, Anna, Lisa, and Centra shared that since COVID-19, their students could not engage one-to-one and working online was a challenge. In particular, Anna, Lisa, and Centra had difficulty focusing on what the ELLs were doing. Anna said, "some of the students did not own a computer, so they could not sign on or participated online." Lisa shared, "it made a difference to have the students in person. I had built a relationship with the students."

The participants shared that they needed and looked for intervention instructional strategies to overcome pandemic-related obstacles and challenges to helping students, especially ELLs. Vetta, an RTI director, explained that she and the teachers had to become tech coordinators:

> The teachers and I had to use Formative, a web-app for classrooms that permitted teachers to provide online assignments to students and ways to adjust and track students' growth, it was really good for ELLs, because it gave ELLs the same access to assessments it monitored, it presented in the same format where the ELLs could record themselves, and the teachers and I could monitor the reading levels of the students and assess them.

Unlike Fawn, Nancy—an RTI teacher of 6 years—shared her changes in teaching ELLs during the COVID-19 pandemic and discussed her needs and challenges on how schooling has changed during the pandemic.

> Everything had changed. COVID completely changed everything, I used the Jam-Board. Like a whiteboard, it had helped in getting the students to participate. And Nearpod was useful too. It detected where students were in their learning, provided formative assessment insights, and offered tailored instructions.
>
> Engaging the ELLs… it was difficult to engage students using different platforms. With the internet, students can keep themselves hidden and be in total control.

In regard to COVID-19, Anna noted that the children were being left behind because online instruction was ineffective in assisting those who required RTI services: "it made a difference that the students were given things to do to stop the decline in their academics during the COVID-19 process, despite COVID-19 influencing teaching in the

classroom." Vetta explained how she had to go above and beyond during virtual instruction by giving supplemental RTI reading strategies and comparing reading cycles while examining student data to monitor each student's progress:

> I have my data assessment spreadsheet, and I constantly monitor the kids, what they got in the first cycle versus what they got in the second cycle. What they got in their reading levels versus what they got in their writing level, and I monitored them throughout because if you do not monitor them, you can really lose sight. Any intervention service that helped you with data gathering, you need to gather the data and assess because you could have a ton of data and not know what you were looking at.

Fawn shared that additional RTI reading strategies were beneficial for helping ELLs during the pandemic and virtual teaching: "I find taking small chunks of things and making sure that they understood what they were reading for their comprehension, it helped a lot. Making it bite-sized pieces helped."

Participants also shared what they did with ELLs while conducting RTI reading post pandemic and how they had to be creative. Anna explained that using RTI supplemental resources provided her students with the tools they needed to succeed in the classroom:

> I did model and clapping and start-stop vibrations to help the students with their syllable discrimination. I focused on transitions from syllables to on-sets and rhyming and name recognition. Also, I looked at blends since the students had difficulties with blends and metacognition, thinking outside themselves when they were reading to understand what they were reading… so when they were doing

explicit instruction and repeating daily, they were improving their accuracy and

parity when they were reading… I used different reading centers. Reading centers

are different sections or group of students placed together to engage in one-to-one

teaching. I created a fluency center for practicing fluency and then used the

computer to click on a narrative to listen to the fluency patterns in the story

followed by questions to help acquire fluency.

Lisa explained that she was providing extra practice beyond a creative curriculum to

enhance RTI reading for ELLs. She explained how she used the repeating method before

the pandemic:

Before COVID, I did a lot of repeating by showing them anchor charts or hand

charts that ELLs could use on the table. This was done daily when going over

different reading strategies. I try to have a lot of anchor charts... Using the concept

wall also helps ELLs visualize how to complete a task. I believe using many

photos with projects, showing guidance on how to complete the projects, and

offered steps or sequence in order. I also partner paired ELLs as well.

Dana offered her thoughts on RTI reading tactics and what could be done to help ELLs

read while revising the reading contents as a way to improve reading. "I do the whole

group reading; it was more effective because it allowed students to read out loud."

Subtheme: Teachers Need and Used RTI Curriculum Implementation Strategies in

Their Middle School Classroom

The participants agreed that the RTI curriculum must be specifically designed for

middle school. Though working with the various intervention programs was helpful,

teachers claimed they need the curriculum to address ELLs. Nancy, a 6-year RTI teacher,

and Fawn, a 17-year RTI director, shared that using the sheltered instruction observation protocol was helpful for middle school ELLs. Nancy explained that middle schools have a very different setting than the elementary grades and that curriculum was designed to assist ELLs achieve academic growth:

> In my school, it is not called RTI; we used the word *sheltered instructions* with a separate ESL curriculum leveled to their language. But since the new push in education Every Child Succeeds Act, I co-teach with the ELA teacher. I support the class grade level class and differentiate for the different levels in the room. This year's class was called collaborative literacy, and ELLs were being permitted to remain in regular education.

Fawn explained that her school is a public charter middle school and that its population is quite different, with more than 600 students, more than 400 of whom are English language learners:

> So, the focused was on increasing ELLs' foundational skills because some do have comprehension deficit. … So, building comprehension was essential, especially when these ELLs do not have the foundational skills that were necessary. So, we used the SIOP, the SIOP strategies are scaffolding and building background knowledge, and there was an existing template for all lesson plans. And again, SIOP is perfect for all learners, not only ELL learners. … We use it for pre-teaching to build vocabulary activities to help ELLs bridge that gap, and implementing instruction, to individualize student's progress.

> Two of the participants, Centra and Dana, explained that monitoring and differentiation of the curriculum would benefit middle school ELLs. Centra noted

teachers can use monitoring and differentiation to create a more inclusive curriculum based on evidence-based instruction:

> Monitoring was my top priority. Also, evidence-based instruction is important if it is conducive to learning. You must manage and oversee the groups. Also, ELLs needed to learn to answer and respond to [a specific directive] and that required evidence-based instruction. Students could read the text for evidence, then respond using ordinary words. But, if not...students are unlikely to know what to do. One-to-one and repeated measures, with differentiation, supported learning.

Dana shared that differentiation instruction and the [reading] materials were heavily differentiated. Further, the ELLs' reading background was easy for her to differentiate based on her students' level. Dana shared: "I can find certain reading materials that could help the students based on the students' state test the comprehensive test scores, and depending on where they scored on those tests, it placed them on the RTI path." Lisa shared monitoring was closely observed for ELLs at her school:

> I have to say monitoring, the monitoring progress every time the ELLs took a test, we put those data's scores down, it is considered data, and we looked at those data after 6 to 8 weeks, and we determine, will these student progress if he or she received more Tier 3 support… or can he or she be tiered down to Tier 2, which is a small group.

Anna shared that the students in her class function well in reading and are close to grade level.

> So, I give more advanced materials, especially the ELLs who are at the middle level, they needed more help. Some of my children have IEPs and go to the

resource room, and the special education teacher works with a small ELLs group

to help with their fluency and comprehension skills.

Vetta, the RTI director, shared her views on curriculum-based, differentiated lesson plans and the tiers teachers used within their classroom:

So, the curriculum…was part one of the resources available in all tiers.

Significantly, Tier 1 basically everybody fell under, Tier 2 and Tier 1, and then

some were diverted to Tier 2 and Tier 3. So, the teachers and I used our

curriculum because this was a way to use RTI without spending a dime. We do an

action plan on the interventions, we looked at the paperwork, whatever data,

samples, and work from there. I love the tier system because every school was

different. Every school had various resources and should be able to utilize these

resources…every kid was a Tier 1 that was where all get the same help. They all

got the same curriculum. Tier 2 kids are just struggling in one or two areas and

needed the push. In middle schools, you must make sure the scheduling is perfect.

So, the students who were engaged in Tier 1 would engage in Tier 2 even though

they were part of the general population.

To foster success in RTI reading in middle school, Ai, another RTI director,

"made a schedule, and made the ELLs available for it, and provided the curriculum to the

teachers, and say, 'listen you were going to engage in RTI instruction, and I would give

you Tier 2 learning materials."

Five participants shared that the teachers needed RTI curriculum specific to ELLs

in middle school. The participants all agreed that, to ensure RTI was working in their

school, classroom, or district, the curriculum must be specific, effective, and supportive

for ELLs. Anna added that, in her middle school, the curriculum used block time for RTI reading, which was segmented into certain blocks. Most participants agreed that a 6-to-8-week RTI program was provided at the middle schools. Ai said the RTI program in her school was a 9-week unit; however, she elaborated on the need for RTI curriculum to be tailored specifically to ELLs in middle schools:

As it is called RTI, it is done throughout the day, and we [needed to] make a schedule, you make students available, and provide the curriculum to the teachers. Then RTI was divided into three different groups, so the whole class is treated as Tier 1, so when you teach your normal regular class, the students were being taught at Tier 1. And students at the lowest, after a couple of weeks, if the students were not doing well, limitations in their understanding of the concepts or not responding to you or your questioning, they lacked critical thinking they were placed in Tier 2. You set a specific goal then do progress monitoring. They stayed in Tier 2 for about nine weeks.

Lisa, another RTI director, shared that RTI curriculum had to be specified for middle school ELLs and implied that teachers could engage in early intervention. Lisa also indicated that teachers use problem-solving techniques to make decisions while using the research-based interventions, such as assessment in screening, diagnosing, and ongoing monitoring for ELLs. Lisa said that "teachers did the RTI process immediately, and did a lot of screening, testing the students on their lowest deficit, and we moved from there." In addition, Dana, a teacher of RTI for 10 years, shared what occurred in her school when using a specialized curriculum to help ELLs:

The teachers did the same strategies that were explicitly designed for RTI, such as using problem-solving to make decisions when using the research-based intervention and using the assessment for ELLs. The students' data was used and using a computer-based system merge data from the system and saw where the ELLs were at, their gains and decrease in their academic level. If there was a decline, we could call the parents and give one-to-one support, and conduct more check-ins with the ELLs.

Participants also revealed that the use of specific assessments that assess ELLs twice or multiple times a year were helpful with early intervention because these assessments allowed teachers to determine if their students made progress towards the standards embedded in the curriculum. Centra explained that small grouping for the reading intervention was designed specifically for ELLs, and that she could concentrate on one-to-one individualized teaching because not all ELLs are the same level or learn the same way:

So, I differentiated the lesson, and that does not mean a child was going to learn a different topic. The ELLs learned the same skill but at a different level. Those who were efficient and were competent in a skill worked at a higher level, and ELLs who needed help learned the same skill but at a lower level.

Moreover, Fawn, a teacher of 24 years who taught for 17 years as an RTI director, added that there was a need for RTI curriculum to be designed to help middle school ELLs address the root cause, such as putting English into perspective to understand reading:

WIDA works great for RTI now that they conduct MTSS/RTI, so you could get to

the root of the problem with data-driven decisions, for sure. Absolutely, I was

always looking at the data to grasp what the ELLs struggled with. The teachers

and I could monitor their progress, and then used the screening, diagnostics, and

progress monitoring as well. … When using the tiers for middle school, it was

designed under MTSS/RTI, Tier 1 where all students got the same instruction,

Tier 2 got a little more specialized instruction like a small group. And then Tier 3

was very individualized. If a student had an IEP and it was a language deficit or

barrier, or if it was a reading barrier, we used Edgenuity, an online curriculum

with classes and videos, and then a basic understanding of concepts. So, each

lesson had vocabulary words. I pulled the data, did lesson preparation to build a

background. It was great for scaffolding.

When thinking about what teachers need for the RTI curriculum, specifically for

ELLs in middle schools, Nancy added that "the Sheltered Instruction was specifically

designed for the ESL curriculum. We used the data of the students that needed intensive

interventions." Participants also shared that their perspectives on curriculum-based

measures and differentiation that were helpful to RTI reading, and depending on the

groups of students and level of reading materials, had to be advanced or adjusted if ELLs

needed help.

Subtheme: Teachers Used Literacy Methods to Increase ELLs Academic Growth

To help ELLs, participants shared that they needed guided comprehension

instructions to meet literacy requirements regarding decoding, phonemic awareness,

sight-words, and phonic awareness. The participants shared that they used literacy

methods such as one-on-one, read aloud, and repeating to assist ELLs in reading. Ai said, "all ELLs were given individualized attention." Dana further explained that one of the benefits of using literacy methods was allowing her to see minor issues with teaching ELLs, and discussed the push for more resources for the ELLs and their families:

> I allowed the ELLs to read aloud, and I give direct help to those who exhibited poor reading skills. Using an RTI curriculum specifically designed to help ELLs could create consistency in RTI reading that could lead to great results. And once RTI was used for ELLs, it worked really well on all levels and was helpful to master English, I feel that it allows me to see what my kids were addressing, minor issues and pushed for more resource and support for the ELLs and their families.

Similarly, Lisa indicated that, "when using a program like easy CBM, that assess students' skills, you were able to hold down the students' deficit and used repeating teaching, I like that part for teaching as well for the ELLs."

All participants shared that teachers need guided comprehension instruction to literacy requirements such as decoding, phonemic awareness, sight-words, and phonic awareness to help ELLs. The participants explained that teachers can use various methods to increase comprehension at the middle-school level depending on ELLs' needs. Ai explained that the bulk of the program targets ELLs: "when we gave a diagnostic test, we find that the ELLs were reading at a very low level." Anna explained that guided instruction was useful in her school. Teachers mapped what must be followed in block reading, and Anna and the other teachers were not supposed to deviate:

After screening and I realized the students did not know the English language, I used the phonics. I started with baby steps, so we did phonemic awareness, knowing the sound that the letters made, putting the sounds together, using diagraphs blends, forming short sentences, looking at pictures, and getting the ELLs to speak about the picture so they could develop a dialogue.

Vetta, another director of RTI in her school, said, "for comprehension, we used decoding, sight words, and phonemic awareness, and phonics for ELLs. It was included in the standards." Lisa gave a descriptive insight into what had occurred while conducting comprehension in her school and engaging in comprehension with ELLs:

I repeated teachings because these ELLs could hear the sound of the words. They were able to hear and listen to examples of how to read with fluency, expression, and pronunciation. In Tier 1 the teachers supported the ELLs with scaffolding the instruction… at times, I had to break down a lot of words, like root words, Latin, Greek, even prefixes and suffixes, and on rare occasions, segmenting words to figure out how to pronounce them. Students might occasionally mispronounce a word, it was not wrong to them, but in the English language. I use scaffolding …like the theme and the moral of the lesson. I made the lesson engaging of their interest. I did a mixture of decoding, phonics, sight words, phonemic awareness… for sight words, they went over words… for fluency.

Other participants shared how comprehension was used as a guide in RTI and how useful the various intervention programs were when engaging in literacy. Dana shared that using the intervention program helped with decoding, sight words, and more:

So, I used the intervention system, System 44… heavily for decoding, sight

words, phonemic awareness, and phonics because the ELLs could record it; It also

helped them decode words or keep track of where they were. As the kids

struggled, the system would offer them more words to decipher until they learned

it. They then moved on to more words when they were done. The ELLs read and

decoded the words for 25 minutes each day. … I send some words home to help

with decoding practice. … In addition, the computer-based model provided books

for the kids on their level, literature that they could read and that I could follow

for the ELLs.

Two other participants agreed that comprehension was ingrained in the reading;

thus, it is critical to address comprehension. Centra explained how she prepared a lesson

plan to address critical thinking:

I created a lesson plan to address the ELLs specific skills because part of the

students' prior knowledge was limited to English, so I adjusted my intervention

technique and used bilingual lessons to do text evidence, answered brief

questions, and practice using a dictionary skill.

Fawn—a teacher for 24 years and an RTI director in the Midwest for 17 years who

oversaw 400 middle school ELLs—explained how teachers focused on comprehension

methods to make sure that they can increase literacy:

The teachers and I had to focus on comprehension as well as writing too. So, I use

visualizing and organizing the pieces the students were trying to read, and then,

comprehension type questions at the end…if ELLs did not have those

foundational skills, they were not going to go far. So, there were students in Tier

1, Tier 2, and they were evaluated on their proficiency. We gave them an access

test, and they had to pass all four portions at the same time to graduate from the

program.

Nancy, a teacher of RTI for 6 years, shared what occurred when conducting guided

comprehension approaches within her ELL classroom using grade level materials:

This year a lot of the grade-level material was very difficult to make

comprehensible for a low-level English learner. We did not have a curriculum that

focused on learning a language. The focused was on the content area, learning

English through the content area, and the academic language. But a lot of ELLs

were newcomers and test scores were 1.7 they needed much English to be kept at

Tier 2 and be able to put simple words and phrases together. So… they were still

not ready to communicate in a classroom. So, I had to guide those students in the

classroom.

Theme 2: Teachers Need Support and Collaboration With Leaders and Peers

Some participants shared they needed support and collaboration from their leaders

and peers, especially when classes had ELLs. Ai, an RTI director, shared that most of the

time: "teachers have been given time to teach ELLs, one on one, also a special education

teacher was hired, and that person pulled ELLs from every class." In addition,

participants shared that an important means of support from administrators and other

teachers were having time to discuss RTI with them.

Vetta explained that teachers shared information among each other on how to

conduct RTI with ELLs and when working with this population:

Teachers did [peer consulting] in RTI, and the lead teacher who conducted RTI showed the other teachers how to get the students at the same grade level … an action plan was created, and every teacher had one to follow; as a director, I am totally engaged with the teachers on RTI. Also, there needed to be meetings to collaborate among the teachers so that ideas on RTI were shared and on how the students were doing in the program.

Anna stated that leadership at her school was missing, even though they had new ELLs who needed assistance adjusting to RTI reading:

Leadership support was not really supportive. They put the children in my class and say "you are getting this new student, they were new to the country do the best you can, we will see if we can get the ESL teacher to come and take them also", and it took time for the ESL teacher to come and test them to determine if services were needed, Also, a backup teacher works with ESL students occasionally. I manage on my own. I did extensive research on RTI-friendly techniques in my class. The only collaboration between the administrators and me had to do with testing ELLs, and some had poor academic and behavioral issues, so I worked with the parents to help the ELLs. The consultant dealt with disabled ELLs, pushing in. Collaboration with administration they say, "let everyone be aware of the task they have to do." no RTI team was on site, but I did collaborate with a coordinator and a reading lab teacher.

In terms of support, Lisa mentioned that the ESL instructor helped her clarify issues in the classroom to help ELLs better understand the lessons:

Sometimes, the ESL teacher would come in and sit with the students, and they would give me support with the explanation of everything. And I was able to talk with the ELLs and see what their issue was, and she would guide, or she would pull them aside, or I would provide her with my lesson, and she would pull them out and then explained the lessons to them. Also, I liked the fact that there was some help in the classroom. The special education teacher took the ELLs out, and I provide them with additional work that I had done, but the ESL teacher would break it down more so that the ELLs were able to understand the lesson. We also had a team, it was a two-man team that met once a month, as the RTI director, I addressed the deficit of the ELLs. I met with the specialist and interventionist; I need a full team to collaborate with.

Dana also explained that she had assistance and that the RTI program was being monitored; however, she interacted with other teachers on a limited basis:

The school and teachers executed the RTI program; however, there was some double-checking to ensure that everything was done correctly, and meetings with teachers were minimal. Still, there were arguments on what to do with ELLs because of their language obstacles, the fact that many of the children could not speak English, and they were left behind, and if they did catch up, then they were moved on. Support was required not only from teachers and leaders, but also from the families. If the families required assistance, leadership would have to provide resources so that they could effectively assist their children. When I met with the special education teacher, it was to make sure that they were teaching the same curriculum, engaging in the same program I was doing because collaboration was

more about finding an easy way out of working the RTI program. I remained the only one using the RTI program because it was good research to helping ELLs. Centra shared that support for teachers at her school came from other reading teachers, the reading coach, and the literacy coach:

The ELL department collaborated with the general education teachers. The principal was very supportive; also, there was an RTI team made up of teachers, and they were eager to help the general education and special education teachers. They did a lot of talking, explaining, and describing what the teachers should be doing with ELLs. There was sharing of students running records or data at the meetings, depending on what they were doing in the classroom.

Fawn explained that she had no support from the principal but supported and collaborated with the staff:

Due to federal laws, the administrators must provide some support because once the school was engaged with RTI, there were protocols that needed to be followed, such as who engages in the tiers. And as far as supporting the ELLs teachers, I assisted the teachers in planning for each student and made certain goals were set and met. Yet, I was aware that the teachers supported each other with ELL instructions, such as the special education teacher. For example, the push was for the special education teachers to assist the general education teachers with basic reading, but they did not use ELL strategies and most of the interventions I came up with and engaged with the team in sharing ideas.

In support of collaboration with teachers, Nancy, who had 6 years of experience teaching RTI in her middle school, made clear that she felt lucky to work with an amazing team:

The two ELA teachers I worked with joined forces, and they did co-teaching. They conducted meetings among themselves to share ideas on how to solve the students' problems. Content meetings were 3 days a week, and I worked closely with the ELA team; we had a successful year working together. The special education teacher did work with us, but she was on a different team and did not engage with the ELLs. Yet, the senior-level, such as the principal, was excellent in hearing our ideas on what works for them with ELLs.

Theme 3: Teachers Need Professional Development and Training to Address RTI

All eight participants shared that there was some PD about ELLs occurring at their school or within the school district that they valued. Participants gave a descriptive view of what occurred in PD and indicated that they needed some form of training to address RTI reading with ELLs, either through self-training or training offered by the school or district. Ai shared that her school had a team to address PD for RTI: "the RTI director, ELA teachers, and homeroom teachers formed a team to handle RTI challenges in PD to support what was happening with the students in RTI reading." Vetta shared that PD was an opportunity to share notes, share with the principal:

The information was more to utilize teachers to engage in more instruction to support the ELLs. Yet, a learning community did come in and shared insights with the sixth to eight grade teachers to clarify the information to specifically target students. Also, to increase our knowledge on RTI, the teachers and I were

engaged in a summit outside the school. In this PD, the professional learning

community (PLC) trained us for 6 weeks to ensure successful RTI. It was helpful

because it was like "we drank the juice" it was like a program that was perfect for

us, and due to our various backgrounds, it was very interesting, and it taught us

how to create our own interventions without spending over $100,000 to follow the

complete RTI intervention program in our middle school. We stayed to the

minimum cost of Tiers 1, 2, and 3 instructions that were mandatory.

Anna reported that the district had brought someone in to discuss ELLs; however,

only one workshop was open to all teachers. Anna also said that the district employee did

address the ELLs' needs, but this information was limited in scope:

While there was discussion on how to handle the needs of ELLs, the meeting was

ineffective. There was no meat or potatoes in sight. Someone in the meeting

claimed to be a member of the PLC and stated that they were there to assist us in

the PD meeting, but they only did so once. Despite ELL teachers meeting

monthly, administration checked in, as they were concerned about attendance and

low grades. Low attendance led to meeting with the attendance teacher, where we

discussed how many absences and whether ELLs were making academic

progress. PD was to address students' behavior issues … [positive or negative, if

positive] they were given a Positive Behavioral Intervention Support (PBS)

marked to reward good behavior.

Like Anna, Lisa said that PD with the teachers was not conducted on a regular basis at

her school. As a new director, Lisa attempted to offer PD once a month to check on

ELLs' progress:

As a new director, I attempted to have PD with the teachers once a month to check on how they were progressing with the ELLs, to check on students' deficits, to see if there were any more ELLs required RTI help, and to inform the teachers about testing. Teachers were questioned if they understood the RTI process in PD, for example, because some teachers revealed that some children were having difficulties, but that more assistance was needed to address ELLs.

Centra, a RTI teacher for 10 years, shared her thoughts on PD at her school. She shared that PD was held twice a month to connect with colleagues' teachers on their work with ELLs:

Teachers, gathered twice a month and spent a lot of time talking, explaining, and describing what needed to be done. The teachers also met separately twice a week to review and compare data from the children. In PD we were seated by grade level, with me, the ELL teacher, and the special education teacher in the front row. They were ready to assist the teachers in general education. We would compare the running records or data of the students. We learned from each other in PD. There would be a designated leader, and we would all work together to ensure that we were meeting the requirements of ELLs in order to help them advance academically.

Dana shared that middle school was different from elementary school when it came to PD:

It is not like when I was teaching RTI in elementary school and I received PD. Teachers helped one another, but RTI was rarely supported in this middle school; the RTI team consisted of one individual who purchased the district's curriculum.

> We had someone come in and talked to us about the students' behavior and shared
>
> some resources with us.

Nancy mentioned that the teachers worked with a company called Mass Insight to offer PD to assist the teachers who offered RTI reading. Nancy shared that, during PD, teachers set goals to further assist ELLs; however, the goals were rarely referenced, and collaboration mainly occurred between the ELA and ESL coach.

The participants agreed that teachers needed RTI training because RTI is an effective way to teach ELLs who have specific requirements. Vetta noted that she and other teachers attended RTI training outside of school:

> I went to a 3-day RTI training program a few years ago. They held an enrichment
>
> activity for assessment teachers with the highest-grade kids who passed and those
>
> who had students who failed at the summit, and they demonstrated how to use the
>
> enrichment activities to help ELLs pass. We were taught that we could expand the
>
> enrichment activities with little or no money. We were taught to use the data of
>
> ELLs who were not progressing in a timely manner and to send the information
>
> immediately to the Office of Special Education Services. It was a bridge, a
>
> [link] between kids who just needed a little support and others who had
>
> gone under the radar, and needed related services.

Vetta also discussed training in RTI reading in middle school and school-based RTI training:

> Training for RTI reading in my middle school was quite different, it was very
>
> strategic and direct, and the teachers were not adequately prepared in training. It
>
> was like being in a house with no light and a flashlight. RTI was the flashlight,

and I just felt like…I was trained in a certain way…But I felt like my training was a little better because you were utilizing your own resources. If teachers knew the standards for the first cycle, they could use lesson plans as a guide and have all teachers teaching the same thing. Other administrators and I battled for a 6-week action plan. Afterwards, teachers were revisited, Once the students had achieved success, the action plan was no longer needed. If the teachers informed us that there was no impact, no substantial progress from the ELLs, the administrators and I would preserve the part of the action plan that was working.

Anna's training at her school and in her school district was quite different than the training other participants received, and Anna expressed that more should have been done to help teachers assist ELLs:

I felt the district and the school should make sure that every teacher was trained to deal with ELLs. …There was minimum help. Other ELLs teachers assisted with the ELLs, but we were not taken seriously with training, the ELLs did not get the services needed.

Lisa, one of the new RTI directors, shared her experience on training pre-COVID-19 and post-COVID-19, and discussed the little training she had to assist ELLs during the pandemic.

Training teachers to conduct RTI in middle schools was not offered in all schools, although all schools had strategies in place to address ELLs in RTI classes. Dana shared that much of her training came from her college courses or doing her own research:

So, I like to do my own RTI research, and that was done online. I signed up and

emailed for free stuff. I train outside because I want the ELLs in my classroom to

move forward. I learned about RTI outside of the school setting.

Centra shared that training was voluntary because teachers had to be knowledgeable of

the content: "Teachers were expected to know new strategies and new research on RTI

and be willing to implement them." Fawn shared that, because there were many ELLs in

her school, teachers needed to be trained on the contents of the novels students read in

their classes:

To know which books and novels to use for ESL classes, we needed to be trained,

as the director, I provide teachers with some training. I have had years of training

as a librarian and principal, so I understand the importance of implementing an

RTI program because it will benefit the kids.

Theme 4: Teachers Need Administration to Know What Concerns They Have About ELLs and RTI Reading

All participants expressed concerns regarding how administrators approached

ELLs and RTI reading and wanted them to be more aware of the challenges in using RTI.

Many of these concerns are embedded in the general exploration of the teachers' needs,

as represented in Theme 1. Theme 4 focuses on the concerns teachers wanted to have

elevated to the district or building head level. Participants concerns included ELLs'

ability level, materials, deficits, data, RTI reading, classroom management, and additional

support for ELLs. Participants also mentioned inadequate curricular materials and

staffing.

Anna shared that her students had different ability levels, and she did not have the necessary materials to meet the needs of ELLs. Similarly, Nancy shared that her school only had one ESL teacher per grade despite there being 60 ELLs at each grade level who had many needs. Nancy also posited that significant gaps existed between teachers' instruction and students' learning. Fawn and Dana shared that ELLs in their schools were not engaged and were too easily distracted; thus, it was a struggle to keep these students on task. Centra noted that teachers who do not know how to manage their classroom struggle to engage with ELLs. In addition, Lisa observed deficits in students' diagnostic tests, so the ELLs had to be tested on a different scale. Ai discussed how maneuvering the paperwork was complex. Although ELLs' data showed some progress, they did poorly in Tier 2 in each grade level. Vetta found it challenging to understand the tiers system and ensure that monitoring and the evidence-based instruction could help the students gain academic growth. Vetta also posited that ELL information shared among administrators must be accurate, and described a time when inaccurate information created misperception among the staff and administrators. Lisa discussed what she wanted administrators to know about ELLs' data and RTI reading guidelines to ensure RTI was done correctly: "It was necessary to input the students' tiers progress into the data system. More administration involvement, and teachers could work together to provide support for their ELLs."

Anna asserted that administrators must know about ELLs' RTI reading and behavior and explained that behavior needed to be taken seriously:

The academic behavior and absences of the ELLs were challenging. The teachers tried to work with parents and try to create a positive environment. There was a

great attempt to work on the prerequisite skills and had a system set up to work on

students' behavior. But support from leadership was minimum. When attempted

to apply the factors such as curriculum-based measures and differentiating lesson

plans, there was nothing much, so I had to resort to pulling things online, such as

RTI packets and RTI sources.

Similarly, Centra needed the administrators to know that classroom management was an

issue with ELLs, and having help with this population was paramount: "When

implementing instructions, more information on the contents of the curriculum to use as a

guide would have been helpful to assist these ELLs when it came to reading and creating

sentences in English."

Dana explained that ELLs were placed in special education despite having no

learning disabilities. Dana explained that ELLs need additional support to improve their

academic grade level; however, having unnecessary individualized education plans

(IEPs) for English deficit prevents them from receiving it, which ultimately hinders their

progress. Dana also discussed how resources are scarce and teachers must understand the

curriculum for Tiers 1, 2, and 3. In addition, the administrators must pay attention to data

and program operation for ELLs. Fawn, an RTI director for 17 years, expressed that her

concerned was access to the testing. Moreover, Nancy shared that RTI reading was very

intensive. Though RTI reading was a separate ELL curriculum, the content areas under

the SIOP umbrella should be spoken or taught, and the students should have that option.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I reported the study results. The study results showed that

participants indicated a need for RTI reading to help ELLs overcome language barriers.

In addition, participants detailed that RTI reading could be used to help ELLs in middle schools and contended that teachers could use intervention programs to support ELLs' academic success. Though implementing intervention programs to assist ELLs can be challenging, literacy methods can be used to help ELLs achieve academic growth. All eight participants shared that RTI was a work in progress; however, they perceived that RTI reading strategies were feasible to ensure that ELLs in middle schools achieved academic growth. In Chapter 5, I interpret the findings of this study and discuss the study limitations. Lastly, I present recommendations for future study and discuss the implications for positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine what support middle school teachers might need when using RTI reading strategies with ELLs. I used open-ended questions directed at eight teachers who had 3 or more years of experience using RTI in middle schools with ELLs in the Northeast to Midwest United States. Data analysis indicated four main findings regarding participants' perceptions of teachers' support and needs while using RTI reading strategies for ELLs in middle schools: (a) teachers need and use effective teaching intervention strategies to support RTI reading instruction, (b) teachers need support and collaboration with leaders and peers, (c) teachers need PD and training to address RTI, and (d) teachers need the administration to know what concerns they have about ELLs and RTI reading. In this chapter, I present the interpretation of the findings in view of the conceptual framework and the literature review, along with limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and a conclusion.

Interpretations of the Findings

In this section, I demonstrate how the current study findings confirm research regarding RTI reading for ELLs, such as the study by C. N. Thomas et al. (2020), who noted that RTI reading is critical to students' growth, especially for ELLs in middle schools, and teachers needed additional approaches to help ELLs achieved academic success (Whitten et al., 2020). I used two lenses to interpret the findings: the study's literature review and the study's conceptual framework. The interpretation section is arranged by the four main theme findings. Before interpreting each of the four themes in

light of the peer-reviewed literature and conceptual framework, I summarize each theme and provide short excerpts from participants.

Theme 1: Teachers Need and Use Effective Teaching Intervention Strategies to Support RTI Reading Instruction

Theme 1 reflected participants' need for more support strategies to address RTI reading in middle school to assist ELLs. The participants found intervention programs were helpful to assist ELLs. For example, Ai, an RTI director, shared that intervention programs were vital support for monitoring and differentiating instruction. Similarly, Lisa shared that intervention strategies served as a support when assisting ELLs in RTI reading.

Theme 1: Interpretation of the Findings in Light of the Literature Review

Studies have shown that teachers have needed and used effective teaching intervention strategies to support RTI reading. States can support districts and schools with data to advance a MTSS for the execution of RTI (Schiller et al., 2020). Puzio et al. (2020) found that schools need to increase accountability to improve reading, and Gonzalez et al. (2020) found it was best for teachers to engage with a reading program when they could understand and follow the reading structure. Participants in the current study shared that using the various interventions helped with RTI reading because they addressed specific areas in RTI reading tiers, and it was essential for schools to become creative to enhance RTI through comprehensive systems. This first theme was similar to findings of Ciullo et al. (2016) that evidence-based interventions could communicate to teachers the needed guidance and direction. All current participants shared that, as teachers, they depended on curriculum materials and guides to help teachers implement

RTI correctly and effectively. Examples of similar conclusions can be seen in the work of Scott (2018), who found that using an explicit comprehension model was effective to teach narrative comprehensive skills. Similarly, Kuo (2015) posited that data-based, decision-making, evidence-based interventions at each tier were a helped for teachers to inform their instruction. Lastly, Snyder et al. (2017) indicated that middle school teachers could use literacy interventions to help ELLs.

Theme 1: Interpretation of the Findings in Light of the Conceptual Framework

Participants relied on strategies to assist with RTI reading instruction. According to Carter-Smith (2018), the RTI framework targets at-risk students, such as ELLs whose first language is not English. The framework for this study included three RTI components to address instruction: Tiers 1, 2 and 3. These tiers are designed to ensure students are provided with academic support (Ockerman et al., 2015). Current participants shared that the intervention programs were supportive when used for RTI reading with ELLs. Participants also claimed that the intervention programs such as I-Ready, Read 180, and Lexia were effective for instruction in the tiers. According to Shinn et al. (2016), educators must use a skilled approach for the RTI program to be effective. The current study participants shared that they relied on these intervention programs now that they were conducting virtual learning to create specific lessons to assist ELLs' reading deficits. Additionally, intervention programs make it easier to design testing, and the participants used a computer-based program to determine the reading levels for ELLs.

Theme 2: Teachers Need Support and Collaboration With Leaders and Peers

Theme 2 reflected participants' needed support and collaboration with leaders and peers. This theme confirmed Griffiths et al.'s (2020) finding that collaboration is an approach to encourage teachers to implement RTI. Current participants expressed a need for collaboration with their leaders and peers to support ELLs in RTI reading. All eight participants gave some description of support and collaboration; for example, Dana shared that although she was interacting with other teachers on a limited basis, this interaction was only to address ELLs' language barriers. Lisa shared that the ESL instructor aided her when it came to clarifying what was going on in the classroom with ELLs so that the students could understand the lessons. Other participants expressed that support came from other reading teachers, the reading and literacy coach, the ELL department, general education teachers, and the principal.

Theme 2: Interpretation of the Findings in Light of the Literature Review

Studies have shown that teachers need support from leaders and peers as they address RTI reading with ELLs. Gomez-Najarro (2020) found that when special education and general education teachers cooperated, they could use their experiences to help struggling students, especially in schools that have diverse learners. Participants in the current study also adhered to supporting each other. Collaboration is a way of supporting teachers to implement RTI because collaboration is associated with students' positive outcomes and provides a pivotal component of equal education opportunities for students (Griffiths et al., 2020). Coordinated efforts between ESL and content-area instructors are necessary to bolster ELLs' success (McGriff & Protacio, 2015). Additionally, K. Smith (2019) found that teachers needed more assistance in preparation

and collaborating with other teachers. One of the current participants shared that the ESL teacher was very supportive of teachers working with the ELLs, which made it possible for the participants to address issues related to ELLs. This finding was consistent with Gebhardt et al. (2015), who found that general and special education teachers can create coalitions to increase collaboration and learning from each other to increase students' academic achievement. Support from leadership can also be helpful. For example, Nadelson et al. (2020) found that principals who listen carefully can support collaboration, especially in middle schools, and principals' attitudes when leading discussions can be motivational for the whole staff. In the current study, participants also indicated that it was important to have administrators' support.

Theme 2: Interpretation of the Findings in Light of the Conceptual Framework

The theme regarding the importance of collaboration confirmed the finding of Printy and Williams (2015) that leaders must be able to guide teachers in fundamental changes essential to support instruction methods. Whitten et al. (2020) emphasized the RTI multitiered service-delivery framework devises screening to identify at-risk students, and the framework was used to create systems of support to monitors students' needs and assist collaborative groups in achieving better results. Participants in the current study agreed that there was a need for support and collaboration, confirming Ciullo et al.'s (2016) finding that support from school leaders is critical to using RTI reading. Furthermore, Sarisahin (2020) found that educators use a skilled approach for the program to be effective, which was supported by current participants' use of team meetings to examine data to identify successful outcomes when assessing RTI to promote students' achievement. Therefore, leaders could support the improvement of educators

who evaluate each intervention. Lastly, G. E. Hall and Hord (2006) stated that when using implementing change in an organization, their model has addressed the personal experiences of participants to promote their growth and skills.

Theme 3: Teachers Need Professional Development and Training to Address RTI

Theme 3 reflected participants' need for PD and training to address RTI and to help ELLs achieve academic growth. For example, Ai shared that, for PD, a RTI team addressed issues associated with RTI, including challenges that were occurring with students in RTI reading. Vetta explained that PD was necessary to share information so that teachers could engage in more instruction to support ELLs. Similarly, Howlett and Williams (2020) found that PD and training should be ongoing to increase ELLs' English language standards. Additionally, Gomez-Najarro (2020) found that teachers were empowered through training, which encouraged them to be active participants in the training.

Theme 3: Interpretation of the Findings in Light of the Literature Review

Studies have shown that PD is one method used to enhance teachers' knowledge when working with ELLs. Alahmari (2019) found that the implementation of RTI components can be fostered through PD. N. L. Smith and Williams (2020) found that educators in English language arts participated in ongoing PD to increase their confidence and abilities to teach literacy skills and strategies. Moreover, Bergstrom (2017) found that high-quality PD was critical to successful RTI implementation. Likewise, Lane et al. (2015) surveyed 365 administrators and found that PD for RTI implementation and its resources was necessary for all tiers.

Another factor that was addressed by current participants was coaching as an aspect of PD. One participant shared that coaching signified the need to have a coach to address RTI, and that coaching could help teachers set goals to further assist ELLs. This finding about coaching was consistent with research by Freeman et al. (2017) who found that a MTSS coaching was effective and operationalized within a MTSS. Similarly, March et al. (2018) indicated that having an RTI coach was an engaging process that increased ongoing support that was beneficial for supporting schools that engaged with state-level RTI implementation projects.

Teachers indicated that they needed training to address RTI. This finding was consistent with Gomez-Najarro (2020) who found that RTI training allowed teachers to be engaged and fostered cooperation that enhanced instruction to meet the students' academic needs. Current participants also supported the need for training to meet the demands of ELLs, echoing Spees et al.'s (2016) findings that academic achievement of limited English-proficient youths supported RTI training and enhanced teachers' confidence in a U.S. town that had a high percent of immigrant families. Some of the current participants were concerned with lack of PD and training and expressed the need to increase knowledge in RTI reading to address ELLs' needs. This concern was consistent with Patrikakou et al. (2016) who found that those engaged in RTI may be limited in preparation to complete specific RTI tasks if they are not given assistance. Moreover, Morrison et al. (2020) noted that steps must be taken when implementing Tier 1 core instruction, Tier 2 progress monitoring, and Tier 3 intervention when the student may or may not achieve academic growth.

Theme 3: Interpretation of the Findings in Light of the Conceptual Framework

PD and training are critical to continuous RTI implementation. Educators who have access to evidence-based intervention and students' data could increase the effectiveness of instructional Tiers 1, 2, and 3 for ELLs (Turse & Albrecht, 2015). Barrio and Combes (2015) found that educators who use RTI can initiate instruction and comprehensive assessment for all children in the general education classroom. Participants in the current study shared that PD and training were necessary to understand RTI because it was created for at-risk readers, especially ELLs. Similarly, Harlacher et al. (2015) found that RTI was designed to support students who needed assistance with their learning, and Martin (2016), Mellard (2017), and Shinn et al. (2016) found that RTI procedures and strategies could be used to expand the multitiered approach and provide more benefits to students. In the current study, only three participants shared that they were supported through PD to check on ELLs' progress through the tiers.

Like the model of CBAM, which illustrates how educators use PD and training to increase activities among educators, the participants in this study expressed their need for PD and training (see G. E. Hall & Hord, 1987). According to G. E. Hall and Hord (1987), stages in one's life could be a cycle that is constantly changing; however, this change can be close to a personal understanding which included the development of concerns and abilities. In the current study, participants shared that they needed PD and training to determine ELLs' knowledge and to understand how to increase ELLs' academic growth. For example, one participant shared that RTI training was necessary to learn the contents in the novel books used to help ESL classes.

Theme 4: Teachers Need the Administration to Know What Concerns They Have About ELLS and RTI Reading

Theme 4 reflected the participants' need for administrators to understand their concerns about ELLs and RTI reading. Stafford (2019) found that teachers' self-efficacy or beliefs were necessary to implement RTI. In the current study, some participants provided detailed information regarding concerns they had about ELLs and RTI reading and shared what administrators needed to know about those concerns. All eight participants shared that they wanted administration to be aware that they had concerns. For example, Anna shared that it was important that administrators knew she had ELLs in her classroom who had different ability levels and had behavior and absences issues. Anna attempted to work with the students' parents to create a positive environment for these students and shared with administrators her concerns for resources to meet the ELLs' needs. Fawn and Dana shared with administrators their concerns that ELLs were disinterested and easily distracted. Similarly, Centra needed administrators to be aware that it is difficult to work with ELLs without proper classroom management. Theme 4 was consistent with Sebastian et al.'s (2019) finding that classroom management remained a significant issue for teachers. Understanding the tier system, monitoring, and using evidence-based instruction could help teachers meet ELLs' specific needs, with the help of administrators.

Theme 4: Interpretation of the Findings in Light of the Literature Review

Studies have shown that teachers need administrators to understand their concerns about ELLs' RTI reading skills. For instance, Garcia-Borrego et al. (2020) found that ELLs' literacy accomplishments were concerning for teachers as well as other educators.

Administrators are often tasked with providing extra support to provide intervention for addressing students' lack of academic success (Gallegos, 2017). Participants in the current study expressed that guidance in instruction from administrators was critical to help ELLs. Moreover, in a study of growth in oral reading fluency of Spanish ELLs with learning disabilities, D. I. Rubin (2016) found that it was vital for teachers to have clear strategies for struggling students, especially ELLs who are trying to overcome reading difficulties, and these strategies can be delivered and reinforced by administrators. The need for administrative help in addressing data was another concern expressed by current study participants. Shideler (2016) found that teachers who use data-driven decision strategies are able to use the data to inform instruction because data targeted ELLs' specific skills. Current participants shared that to address the contents of RTI tiers, they needed guidance, which was consistent with findings from Schiller et al. (2020) that district and school leaders could be critical to advance a MTSS.

Participants expressed the need for administrators to know about additional challenges with implementing RTI. Teachers who have guidance from leaders to combat challenges when engaging with RTI implementation could highlight the need for administrators to exhibit strong leadership because RTI in middle schools can be more challenging than RTI in the primary grades (Jensen, 2016). Current participants also discussed ELLs' behavior as another issue that needs leadership attention. Runge et al. (2016) found that addressing academic and behavioral needs, both by teachers and administrators, could be critical to evaluate the effectiveness of RTI interventions.

Theme 4: Interpretation of the Findings in Light of the Conceptual Framework

Current participants discussed their concerns about ELLs and what they needed administrators to be aware of regarding RTI reading. Barrio and Combes (2015) found that RTI was used as an assessment led by administrators for all students in both special and general education classrooms. Printy and Williams (2015) found that the fundamental changes in RTI were essential to support instruction and methods, and Ciullo et al. (2016) found that administrators providing teachers guidance on using the curriculum materials was beneficial to implementing RTI.

Current participants were concerned about using data to identify teachers' outcomes during the intervention assessment. According to G. E. Hall and Hord (2011), teachers considering or experiencing changes used the CBAM framework, which was designed to help teachers recognize these changes. Current participants described their concerns focusing on extended improvements to ELLs' experiences with RTI reading and behavior challenges and wanted administrators to know what changes are needed to better assist ELLs.

Limitations of the Study

The study had a few limitations. The sample size of eight participants limited transferability to other middle school contexts, but the thickness of the data may increase possible transfer to other settings. Other limitations included researcher bias, sampling techniques, the data collection method, and demographics of participants resulting from self-selection. Researcher bias was a limitation because I explored my educational interest in ELLs' RTI reading; to reduce bias, I avoided personal conversations during the study.

The participants were self-selected, so they may or may not be representative of a wider sample of teachers. Participants were educators from school districts in the Northeast to Midwest United States who had been engaging in RTI reading with middle school ELLs for 3 years or more. The use of my Facebook educational groups and Facebook messenger due to the COVID-19 pandemic and interviewing participants via Zoom may also have affected the results.

The sample was not randomly selected. The study sample comprised of eight female participants who were age 35 and above and of various ethnic backgrounds. Gender bias may have impacted the findings. Male teachers' responses could have differed from what the female teachers shared. Finally, four of the eight participants were RTI teachers who became RTI directors and continued to work in their school districts and their expertise could have influenced the results.

Recommendations

After completing and reflecting on this qualitative study, I concluded there are questions that need further attention regarding teachers' perceptions of RTI reading strategies for ELLs in middle schools. One gap in research is RTI implementation regarding reading instruction in middle schools. I recommend eight areas for future exploration:

- exploring instruction to develop literacy for ELLs that will fit their needs;
- exploring evidence-based intervention to communicate guidance and direction, cognitive strategy instruction, content improvements, and independent practices;

- exploring differentiated instruction so ELLs can participate in language assistance projects to achieve English capability to meet academic standards;

- exploring leadership's understanding regarding what is effective RTI implementation based on their knowledge and understanding of the framework on how to assist at-risk ELLs;

- exploring the use of coaches to engage in the RTI process and thereby increase support for schools participating in RTI reading;

- exploring principals' support and collaboration when leading to motivate teachers who engage in RTI;

- exploring parent engagement in their child's learning because immigrant parents may not be knowledgeable of the U.S. public school education system; and

- exploring PD that could emphasized RTI and workshop presentations to engage teachers and administrators.

These recommendations to promote ELLs' academic growth were also echoed by other researchers. For example, Barton et al. (2020) asserted that leadership involvement was critical for assisting at-risk ELLs. March et al. (2018) investigated the use of coaches to engage in the RTI process, and Nadelson et al. (2020) indicated that more can be achieved through examining principals' support in motivating teachers who participated in RTI. For many years, studies have been conducted on ELLs in elementary schools; however, minimal studies had been conducted on ELLs in middle schools. Future

researchers should study ELLs' engagement with RTI reading and explore how middle school teachers have been instrumental in working with this population.

Implications

The findings of this study have implications for positive social change at the individual, family, organizational, societal, and policy levels. The study emphasized the significance of researching RTI reading to assist ELLs in their academic growth. At the individual level, teachers are the forefront of educating students, especially those who have a language other than English. According to IDEA (2004), RTI was introduced to help students who were failing in schools. At the family level, one participant shared that there was a push for resources that could be helpful when assisting ELLs in RTI reading and their families. Parents' involvement in their child's education is critical, and administrators can foster parent engagement to build trust in the school–home relationship, particularly when a child is placed in RTI programs (Araque et al., 2017; Gallegos, 2017; T. J. Hall, 2015).

At the organization level, according to Regan et al. (2015), both elementary and secondary educators' perspectives on RTI implementation in their schools have essential information about RTI that could enhance RTI for ELLs. As one current participant shared, schools that engage with RTI must follow the tiers' protocols. At the societal level, reinforcement of apparatuses by state educators to regulate a MTSS or RTI implementation to meet state-mandated practices is another way for states to assist districts and schools in evaluating RTI practices to help ELLs. According to Schiller et al. (2020), states could provide better data to districts and schools and their leaders to advance a MTSS or the implementation of RTI. ELLs and their parents who participate in

RTI will have an opportunity to receive the assistance needed to overcome language barriers. At the policy level, the findings of this study highlighted some of the challenges in implementing RTI reading, specifically when working with ELLs (see Berkeley et al., 2020) and ELLs and middle school teachers should be included in the considerations of how RTI reading can be adjusted to help ELLs achieve academic success.

Conclusion

RTI reading is critical to assist students whose initial language is not English. A few studies have shown that teachers working with ELLs in middle schools need further insight to help these students grow academically. There was a gap in the research regarding RTI implementation in middle schools. I conducted this basic qualitative study, guided by the RTI framework and CBAM, to fill that gap. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine what supports middle school teachers perceived they needed to be effective using RTI strategies with ELLs. Although some studies addressed supporting elementary and high school teachers who use RTI intervention with at-risk ELLs (Park, 2019; Snyder et al., 2017), this study focused on middle school teachers. The findings confirmed that participants used comprehensive strategic interventions for support, such as online software (I-Ready, Read 180, Lexia) and other interventions to reduce the number of ELLs who fail middle school classes. Leadership and peers played a vital role in helping teachers who were engaged in RTI reading with ELLs in middle schools. PD and training were instrumental in helping teachers with issues they encountered with RTI implementation. The study findings largely confirmed available research in the field and suggested ways that teachers can further contribute to ELL's academic growth in RTI reading.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

RQ: What supports do middle school teachers perceive they need to be more effective in using RTI reading strategies with ELLs?

Warm-Up Questions: *These questions are not designed to collect demographic information but to provide me with a context for their work experience and to make them comfortable.*

> How long have you been teaching at the middle school?
> Do you participate in response to intervention at the middle school? In what capacity?

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about reading strategies you have used in your ELL class.
    Probes:
    a. What reading strategies do you find effective? Ineffective?
    b. Tell me about the types of reading interventions you used.
    c. How do you use RTI reading strategies to address ELLs' academic needs?
    d. Now in the period of Covid-19 what have change, if any?

2. In your experience tell me about the benefits of using RTI reading for ELL middle school students.
    Probe:
    a. Tell me about some of the challenges you have had using RTI. What principles of RTI do you feel most strongly about? Identifying students at risk, monitoring, using evidence-based instructions?

3. Tell me about the classroom interventions you are currently using to create effective RTI reading strategies.
    Probes:
    a. Tell me about the support you have for projects to assist ELLs.
    b. Tell me about the various tiers you have used in your middle school reading intervention.
    c. Can you tell me more about using Tiers 1, 2, or 3?
    d. Do you have any concerns regarding Tier 2 strategies? Tier 1? Tier 3? If yes, tell me about them? If no explain?

4. Tell me about the strategies such as curriculum-based measures, differentiating lesson plans etc., that support effective RTI implementation in your experience so far?

5. Do you have concerns about any of these factors you have been using? If yes, can you explain, if no, why not?

Probes:
    a. Do any of these factors affect ELLs?
    b. Have you received any support while using RTI reading strategies with ELLs?
    c. Tell me about such support.
    d. What are your concerns implementing these strategies? If any explain, if not why?
    e. What are your concerns about support?

6. Tell me about the support that you are given in RTI reading tiers for ELLs in your literacy class and by who?
    Probes:
    a. What stands out as you prep to engage in RTI reading with ELLs?
    b. What specific RTI strategies support was received? For example, intervening early, using the problem-solving to make decisions, using the research-based intervention, and using the assessment (screening, diagnosing, and ongoing monitoring) for ELLs.
    c. Tell me how you use comprehension, (decoding, sight words, phonemic
    d. awareness, and phonics) with your ELLs
    e. Tell me about the ones you are using in your reading to engage ELLs.
    f. What are your concerns about applying the factors? If yes explain, if no, why not?

7. Tell me of the role of the special education teacher who assists you with the ELLs.
    Probes:
    a. Tell me in what way their role is helpful, if at all.
    b. How do you perceive their support in RTI instruction they provide to ELLs?

8.Tell me about the level of interventions you are given from the senior level (principal, etc.).
    Probes:
    a. Do you have any concerns about the interventions given? Can you tell me about them?
    b. What do you perceive senior level should address about the intervention if anything?

10. Tell me how you engage in professional development at your school and what support do you receive from it?
    Probes:
    a. What groups do you have involved with PD? If any?
    b. What stands out the most about these professional learning communities? If any?
    c. What are your concerns about PD at your school, if any? What works well for you?

      d.   Tell me how RTI interventions are address in PD.

      e.   What are your concerns about being with other professional learners? If any explain? If not, why?

11. Tell me about the RTI team and your role in the team? Is it supportive in any way?

    Probes:

      a.   What are your concerns about forming a RTI team? If any explain, if not why?

      b.   What are your concerns being on the team? If any explain, if not why?

12. Tell me about collaborating with other RTI reading specialists (such as the reading teacher, reading lab teacher) and how they implement instructions?

    Probes:

      a.   What are your concerns about implementing instructions? If any explain? If not, why?

      b.   Tell me about your training on using RTI?

13. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?